LE TOUR! Go Behind The Scenes With SA Legends Impey & Venter P.38

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July / August 2025

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101 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT SHIFTING P.68

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The Man, The Myth, The Moustache

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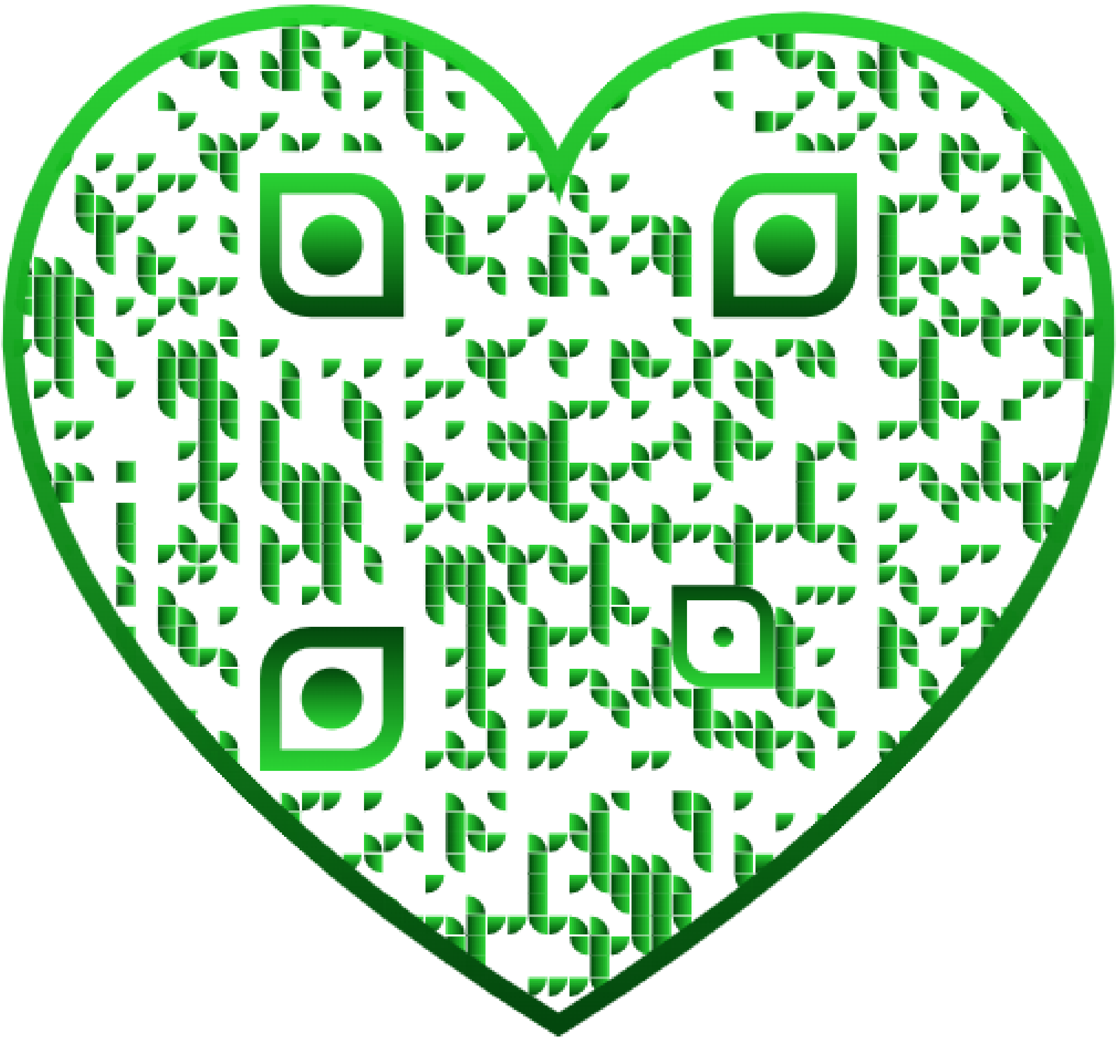

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Image: Erlo Brown / Potkook

LE TOUR!
Bicycling
The Man, The Myth, The Moustache
SPIN IT TO WIN IT!

COVER PHOTO

Trevor Raab

An indoor trainer is a great tool for an FTP test. Knowing your functional threshold power can help you train better and track your progress. You'll sweat, though!

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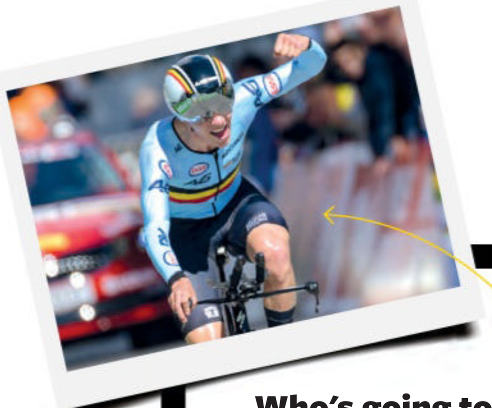

Image: Granada

Who's going to come *second* at the Tour de France?

"Tadej Pogačar. Because, who knows? Maybe Vinegegaard and his team will come to the race with extraordinary form and a creative plan to rattle Pogi in the mountains. They've done it before, they might do it again..."
– JON MINSTER, EDITOR

"Remco Evenepoel. The Belgian is salivating to race. Early-season form suggests he's on track, and I think he'll peak come TdF time – and may even give Pogi a run for his money. He's also a true animator; you know something's going to happen when Remco lines up. Plus, he's a great guy."
– MIKE FINCH, PUBLISHER

"Also stirring the pot... Maybe this isn't Tadej Pogačar's year, and he'll have to settle for the second step on the podium?"
– MARK ARENDSE, SENIOR DESIGNER

"Jonas or Remco... because I think Pogačar – although fatigued, having raced all the Spring Classics – is now on another level entirely, compared to the 2024 TdF."
– PAUL GODDARD, AD GUY

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CIOVITA

Mist in the air. Tyres humming. Cold settling in. There's a calm that comes with committing to the ride, even when the weather turns.

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CIOVITA.CO.ZA

A CHANGE IS AS GOOD AS A HOLIDAY

JUST BEFORE WE SENT this issue to the printers, I did the Berg & Bush Descent – a three-day stage race around Spioenkop in KZN.

The name ‘Berg & Bush’ was familiar to me, as it is to most keen mountain bikers; but for years, I’d filed it away in the lexicon next to other classic races I’d never done, like ‘Sani2C’, ‘Tankwa Trek’, ‘Dr Evil’, etc. But standing around the braai nodding and saying “Ah, yes, Berg & Bush – I’ve heard of it” is nothing like packing your bike, flying to Joburg, shuttling to Winterton and actually doing the event.

My mind was blown.

Living in Cape Town, we sometimes assume (yes, arrogantly) that we have all the best mountain biking in the country, but I’d trade our unfriendly grey rocks for that KZN hardpack any day of the week. And I’d trade my usual descent through Tokai for that 15km drop off Spioenkop in a heartbeat!

▸ THE SEEMINGLY NEVER-ENDING DESCENT FROM THE TOP OF SPIOENKOP, WITH ALL ITS ANGLO-BOER WAR HISTORY, WAS THE HIGHLIGHT OF THE 2025 BERG & BUSH.

Image: sportpix.co.za

Off the bike, the vibes were just as good. The Green family, led by farmer Gary, have created something really special. The race village had a casual, welcoming atmosphere; the beers from Nottingham Road Brewery were always cold; and the food was unbelievable for an event of this size: steak, potjie, endless salads, 24-hour tea and rusks…

So, thank you to Gary and his team for inviting me – this is a race I’ll definitely try to do again. And again.

I guess the point I’m trying to make is that in cycling – and probably also in life – you never regret trying something new. Yes, it seems hard when you’re packing at 11pm, and your 12-year-old son has hidden your gloves somewhere. And when the shuttle bus can’t fit in all the boxed bikes, and you have to drive around Kempton Park for an hour looking for a trailer to rent.

All of that vanishes like morning mist when you’re at the summit of the first hill, in the dust and sunshine, with singletrack unrolling endlessly ahead of you… It’s enough to put a smile on anyone’s face.

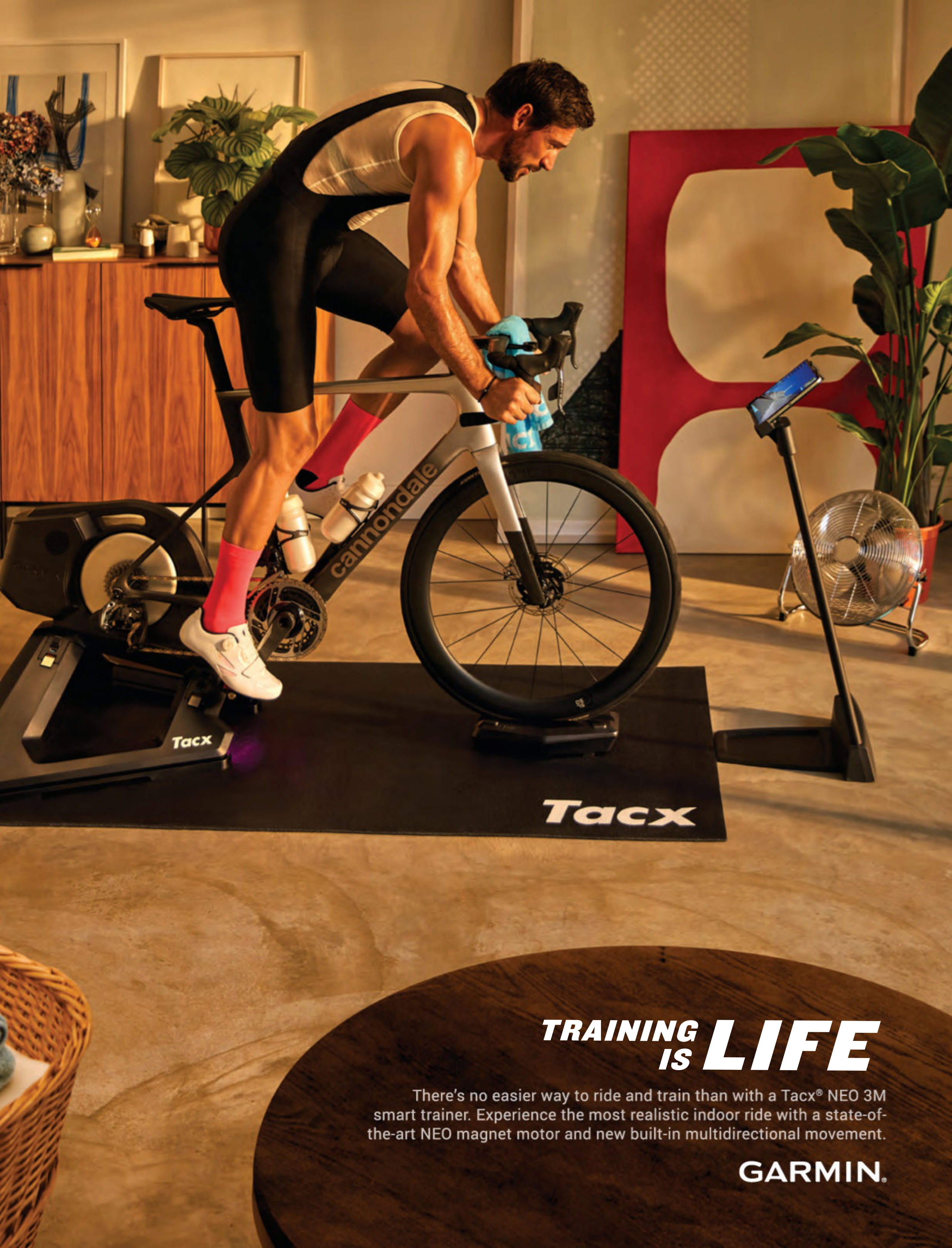
Flying across the country to ride your bike is one thing, but there are lots of other ways to change things up and keep your cycling spark alive; especially during these cold winter months, when it’s all too easy to keep walking past your bike in the garage, pretending it doesn’t exist. Give indoor training a try (*p. 86*) or spoil yourself with a riding holiday closer to home (Potkook is only two hours from Cape Town, *p. 34*). If you’re feeling brave, try one of Daryl Impey’s Tour de France challenges (*p. 38*) in July – in between watching Remco chase Jonas chasing Pog around the Alps.

Some of you might be creatures of habit, and that’s fine, too. If all this talk of change is a bit overwhelming, remember that your comfy routine route is always waiting, as our resident curmudgeon David Moseley is quick to point out (*p. 26*).

The most important thing is to get out there and enjoy yourself. The cold and dark are all in your mind! (Well… okay, they’re not, but work with me here.)

Happy riding – and see you again when sunrise is an hour earlier.

Jon Minster



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PURE MOUNTAIN MURDER

Simon Yates from Team Visma–Lease a Bike flies up the Colle delle Finestre in record time to snatch overall victory at this year's Giro d'Italia. In doing so he banished the ghosts of 2018, when he cracked on this very same mountain and Chris Froome stole the overall GC victory.

Yates' attack caught his other GC rivals off guard: he started the day in third place, but Isaac del Toro and Richard Carapaz marked each other out of the race and dropped behind him, while Yates only had eyes for the summit.

LUCA BETTINI/AFP

DROP IT LIKE IT'S HOT
A huge cabbage tree signals the start of the famous descent into the Umkomaas Valley – known as the Umko Drop – on day two of the KAP sani2c. This descent, plus its spectacular views, are two of the main reasons this iconic stage race is on the bucket list for so many mountain bikers.

ANTHONY GROTE/SANI2C

BLOWN AWAY

Riders battle fierce crosswinds as they make their way towards Spioenkop on day three of the Standard Bank Berg & Bush. But the 15km descent off Spioenkop on the way to a cold beer next to the Tugela River more than made up for the breeze...

And they were lucky! The day after the race finished in early June, a cold front lashed KZN, dumping snow all along the Drakensberg escarpment.

DOM BARNARDT/BERG & BUSH

NEW NUTRITION

SIP THE STOKE

R47 PER SACHET / **OPENFUEL.CO.ZA**

■ After years of cycling and trail running, Cape Town entrepreneur Andrew Bloom was frustrated by the range of often overcomplicated nutrition products on the market; so he decided to develop his own. Say hello to Open Fuel Co.

Bloom has spent most of his nine-to-five life working in advertising, but he was also involved in the launch of the Pyga and Cabal bike brands. Open Fuel Co. is his latest passion project, designed to provide only the essentials: sugars and electrolytes.

Open Fuel sachets deliver 60g of carbs and 500mg of sodium at a reasonable R47 per sachet – enough for a 500ml bottle.

Prof. Ross Tucker, *Bicycling's* Scientific Editor, tested all the flavours and recommends the Zesty Limeade Parade option!

Zesty Limeade Parade Flavour
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OPEN FUEL CO.
Ultra Fuel
Sports Drink Mix
60g carbs + 500mg electrolytes
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Image: Mike Finch

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DIAL IN YOUR MOUNTAIN-BIKE SUSPENSION

BY LYDIA TANNER, CHRIS CASSIDY & ZACH WHITE

PROPERLY SETTING UP THE suspension on your mountain bike can make a huge difference to how it rides and handles. Here are the key factors to consider.

SAG

Sag is the amount of travel you use simply by sitting on the bike in a neutral position. It's the main point of reference you'll need to set up your suspension.

Luckily, sag is also one of the easiest adjustments you can make on your bike; all you need is a shock pump. (If you don't have one, it's a good idea to buy one.)

To get the best performance from your suspension, you'll want to calibrate the sag when you're close to the weight you'll be while riding; i.e. put on all your gear, including your helmet. It's also important to make sure you reset the indicator – the rubber O-ring on the shaft of the shock – before every test.

To test sag, slide the O-ring up against the canister, then ask someone to hold your handlebars while you get on the bike. Put your feet on the pedals and sit neutrally. Then – carefully – get off the bike.

There should now be some shaft showing between the air canister and the O-ring. The distance between those two is your sag measurement. You'll set the sag for your fork the same way, using the O-ring on the stanchion. Most shocks and forks come with percentages already labelled on them, to make measuring and adjusting sag easier.

Anywhere between 20-30% sag is the standard for rear shocks, and 20% sag is the standard for forks. Check the manufacturer's recommendations for your particular model. Your setting could also depend on your riding style.

To adjust the sag, you'll need to release or add air pressure – that's where the shock pump comes in. Again, check the manufacturer recommendations for a starting point.

REBOUND

Rebound is the speed at which the suspension comes back to full travel after it's been compressed.

It's largely a preference thing, but in general you want your suspension to rebound as fast as it can without the shock topping out or feeling too springy. Set it slow, and the suspension can't extend back into its travel before you hit the next bump, resulting in a harsh ride; set it too fast and your bike will bounce like a pogo stick.

To adjust, use the clearly marked control on your fork or shock. If you're confused, find the middle between slow and fast and try that setting; then tweak for your next ride.

COMPRESSION

The compression setting controls the time it takes for your suspension to slow a downward force.

Starting with the control knob completely open (counterclockwise), adjust the compression by turning the knob clockwise. Turn the knob too much, and your suspension will take too long to go through all of its travel; turn it too little, and your suspension will bottom out on small bumps. Experiment to find the sweet spot that best matches your riding style and terrain. (You can also adjust compression on the fly as you ride, depending on the terrain.)

WINTER BOOST

Doppelherz, Germany's number-one vitamin brand, has arrived in South Africa – and there are lots of options for cyclists.

With over a century of experience in wellness, Doppelherz brings scientifically developed supplements designed to support endurance, recovery and overall health – both on and off the bike. Doppelherz made its South African debut at the Cape Town Cycle Tour in 2025.

Editor Jon Minster has been diligently swallowing the Immuno supplement (R220), with vitamins C and E, zinc, folic acid and selenium; and so far he's managed to avoid the dreaded change-of-season cold… ***ivohealth.co.za***

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Images: Titan Racing; supplied

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GET FASTER WITH THESE WORKOUTS

BY SELENE YEAGER

TO GET FASTER ON THE BIKE, you need three main things: a big aerobic engine, the stamina to hold speed, and top-end power to drive you over the finish line.

Try these three key workouts. Done regularly, they'll make you a speedier cyclist – guaranteed.

THE ENGINE-ROOM RIDE

WHY IT WORKS. Long, steady endurance rides are essential for building and maintaining speed. Also known as Zone 2, moderate, or base-building rides, these aerobic-intense, fat-burning rides aren't fast, but they help you become fast by creating a massive aerobic engine.

These rides develop your type-one muscle fibres, which house the bulk of your muscle's energy-producing mitochondria. Long, aerobic-focused rides stimulate mitochondria growth and improve their function so you become an all-star fat burner, which helps you preserve the glycogen you need to hit the gas.

HOW TO DO IT. Do your engine-building rides at about 65 to 74% of max heart rate (MHR); 56-75% of functional threshold power (FTP); and about 4 or 5 on a 1 to 10 scale, where 10 is the hardest. A solid Zone 2 ride for most people lasts two to three hours. Aim for one of these rides (or more, if you have time) each week.

THE CRUISE CONTROL RIDE

WHY IT WORKS. Once you're up to speed, you want to be able to hold that pace so you can hang with the pack without having to fade to the back. Or worse, drop off! This Cruise Control ride is meant to be 'fun fast' as opposed to 'Ermagerd, I'm dying' fast. By riding in Zone 3, you'll also learn to hold your own in a fast-moving paceline.

HOW TO DO IT. During your ride, aim for two to four longer efforts (10-30 minutes in length, with 5-15 minutes easy pedalling in between). The efforts must increase your breathing rate. Aim to elevate your heart rate to around 80-85% of your MHR; 84-94% of FTP; and 7 on a 1 to 10 scale.

It should feel as though you're trying to hang with someone slightly faster than you. Aim for one Cruise Control ride a week.

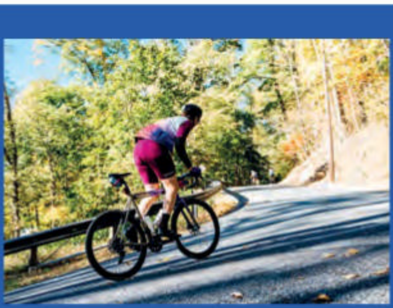
THE THROTTLE TWISTER

WHY IT WORKS. You can't go mad fast if you never go mad fast; yes, you need to do some high-intensity interval training (HIIT). This ride is meant to be 'Dear Lord, make it stop' fast. But it's short, so it's manageable.

HIIT work raises your lactate threshold, so you can ride faster and further before your legs slam on the brakes.

HOW TO DO IT. Warm up first with about 15-20 minutes of easy spinning. Aim to do 4-6 very hard or maximum efforts, ranging from 30 seconds to 2 minutes. In between, spin easy for twice the length of the interval.

Complete these intervals at 95-100% of MHR; maximum FTP; and 9-10 on that 1 to 10 scale. Aim for one session a week. ***B***



WORD'AGE

GRADIENT

This is a measure of how steep a slope is. By dividing vertical height by horizontal distance, you get a percentage grade. Anything from 1% to 3% is considered mild; above 10% is seen as extreme. For most moderately fit cyclists, a grade of 4-5% is satisfying, but not so steep that you feel like you're suffering. Some fearsome climbs on Grand Tours include the Angliru on the Vuelta a España, with some slopes at 23.5%; the Monte Zoncolan on the Giro d'Italia, with a max gradient of 22%; and Col de la Loze on the Tour de France, which has pitches of 20% in the final 4km.

Images: Garmin/Tacx; Mike Finch

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Trevor Raab

IN DEFENCE OF BEING SEEN

BY **TREVOR RAAB**

SAFETY WAS NEVER at the forefront of my mind in my early cycling days. From rocketing down descents to not always wearing a helmet to thinking safety accessories looked silly, I was doing very little to protect myself. I didn't care. But with more road riding experience, and a dash of maturity, came a reality check.

My first brush with distracted driving was when I watched a friend get T-boned midway through a ride on quiet country roads. Luckily his injuries were relatively minor, but it was a wake-up call. Not long after, a driver hit and severely injured a friend who was navigating a simple intersection. A former co-worker is now paralysed after a hit-and-run. Another friend lost his brother to a reckless driver ploughing through a group ride. I could go on with these stories, and I'm afraid I'll only add to the list in the future.

Hundreds of cyclists are injured on South African roads each year, and some sustain serious injuries or pass away. There are very few safeguards in place to protect cyclists, especially on the back roads I love to ride the most – with little to no shoulder and plenty of blind corners. Add that to the fact that drivers are more distracted than ever, whether by phone conversations that can't wait or by buzzing newsfeeds. They choose time and again to ignore their responsibility to safely operate their vehicles, which are bigger than ever, putting cyclists at increased risk by limiting the space left for them. Drivers tend to forget that not all roadways are built exclusively for cars, and cyclists and other non-motorised travellers have the same right to use them. Perhaps some accidents could be ascribed to a lack of adequate driver education, but more often it's a result of impatience and a general sense of entitlement.

Over time, the same roads I once found peace on began to bring an impending sense of doom and a decent amount of anxiety. As my stress grew, so did my desire to mitigate the risk. I began riding with a blinky light, no matter what the conditions. The Bontrager Flare was unobtrusive, bright, and easy to mount on any bike without looking terribly silly. Using the light made me feel better – I did *my* part to up my visibility on the road – but I was still leaving too much in the hands of drivers.

More close calls followed, and a sickening number of people I know kept getting hit by drivers. My anxiety was back to square one. I found myself checking over my shoulder multiple times per kilometre, and reacting to the slightest sounds of potentially approaching vehicles. Getting into the state of calming flow I so much appreciate about road rides was a struggle.

Just as my anxiety started reaching new heights, I got my first taste of radar-enabled lights, thanks to testing new products for *Bicycling*. For those unfamiliar, the rear-view radar system communicates with most cycling head units and prompts a visual and/or audio alert when it detects a vehicle approaching from behind. It then automatically turns on the blinky light or changes it from steady to flashing.

I went for a ride with Test Editor Dan Chabanov to evaluate a Garmin Varia and a Trek Carback side by side. Both radar lights did their job, and we spent much of the ride happily pedalling two abreast when the traffic allowed, sharing conversations and fluidly shifting to single file as the radar alerted us to approaching vehicles. That's not to say there still weren't some jumpy moments – at one point the radar pinged a driver approaching at high speed, causing us to tense up and shift as far to the edge of the road as possible, but at least we knew the car was coming.

These days, especially if I'm already stressed, I choose a short drive to the local trails to ride my mountain bike, but there are still plenty of times I want to enjoy a nice, long road ride, and that's when I'm happy this tech exists. The radar allows me to take the lane more confidently and remain visible, while providing ample time to move to the shoulder as traffic approaches. I still occasionally feel a wave of anxiety when my radar dings, but at least I'm no longer constantly checking over my shoulder at the slightest sound.

> "I STILL OCCASIONALLY FEEL A WAVE OF ANXIETY WHEN MY RADAR DINGS, BUT AT LEAST I'M NO LONGER CONSTANTLY CHECKING OVER MY SHOULDER AT THE SLIGHTEST SOUND."

I'm thankful the bike industry works on innovations to help riders feel safer on the road, though I wish drivers, cities, and the car industry took our safety more seriously. This isn't a place I expected to be – embracing hi-vis and flashing lights – but it seems that for now, it's on us, the riders, to do as much as we can to keep ourselves safe while we wait for the rest of the world to catch up. ***B***

***Senior Photographer Trevor Raab** has enjoyed road riding for most of his adult life. More recently those kays have come with a dose of anxiety; but thanks to advancements in technology, he's been able to reclaim some of the calm that initially drew him in.*

Illustration by Jacopo Degl'innocenti

WHY YOUR NEXT BIKE SHOULD BE AN ALL-ROAD BIKE

BY **DAN CHABANOV**

THERE'S AN IMPORTANT and often overlooked category that fills the space between road-race bikes and dedicated gravel bikes. It's usually called 'all-road' or 'endurance', but other names for this group pop up every few years. For a while, European brands used the term 'Gran Fondo' to describe this kind of bike; and when Specialized launched its first Roubaix model in 2004 (arguably the first production endurance bike), my colleague Matt Phillips recalls someone at *Bicycling* calling it 'plush road'. The basic premise of the category has always been to essentially take a road bike, add a bit of tyre clearance for better compliance, give it lower gearing to better suit the average rider, and tweak the geometry to make it somewhat more upright and comfortable. It was meant for people who wanted to ride, but not necessarily *race*.

What has prevented the all-road bike from being widely adopted is to some extent the bike itself. Brands sacrificed low weight and lively handling in their quest for versatility and stability, then burdened all-road models with unnecessary gizmos – like the Roubaix with its Future Shock, and the Cannondale Synapse with its integrated lighting system. The result was often a bike that was pleasant, but dull and uninspiring.

The way brands position their road bikes has not helped this notion. Read between the lines of industry marketing and you'll get a sense that while buying a race bike can put you on the same frame as some of the biggest stars in cycling, buying an all-road or endurance bike is some sort of admission of cycling inadequacy, which often leads riders to perceive it as the inferior option.

The fact is, most people who buy road-racing bikes do not actually race. Sure, you might enter the Cape Town Cycle Tour or the Double Century, but are you really competing for the podium? And when was the last time you bled through the eyeballs at a criterium around Killarney?

I'm not suggesting there's anything wrong with wanting to go as fast as possible and prioritising aerodynamics and speed when you're shopping for a bike. Many models currently on the market accentuate these features. But the truth is that for the vast majority of riders, a modern all-road bike will fit better and be more comfortable to ride.

> "THE TRUTH IS THAT FOR THE VAST MAJORITY OF RIDERS, A MODERN ALL-ROAD BIKE WILL FIT BETTER AND BE MORE COMFORTABLE TO RIDE."

The good news: brands have begun to catch up to the notion that just because someone needs a bike with a more forgiving fit and relaxed handling, it doesn't mean they want to compromise on how lightweight, responsive or engaging it is to ride.

New, glorious bikes like the Enve Fray and Cervélo Caledonia – and the latest Cannondale Synapse and Trek Domane – are all recent releases made in the new mould of what an all-road bike should be. Not only do they look similar to their road-racing counterparts – with similar frame weight, aerodynamic features and options for high-end parts – they all have geometry and fit better suited to the average cyclist, while incorporating useful features like generous tyre clearance and in-frame storage.

Yes, some of these bikes are also pitched as gravel bikes, but they've essentially turned the old notion of the endurance bike on its head. They're fast, and they offer a level of versatility that aligns better with the needs of more riders.

I'd be naive to think that riders will simply listen to what I'm saying and move across to one of these bikes for road riding, especially if brands continue to pump marketing budgets into selling more race bikes that the pros ride; but I do hope at least a few of you will consider one of these new, all-road bikes when the time comes to replace your trusty steed.

Almost without fail, they're lightweight, aerodynamic, exhilarating to ride, and designed with everyday riders in mind.

***Test Editor Dan Chabanov** started his cycling journey as a bike messenger. He's ridden hundreds of different kinds of bikes, from fixies to fat bikes, but he loves an all-road bike the best.*

THE SPOKESMAN

By **DAVID MOSELEY**

Image: Canva

WHEN THE ROUTINE ROUTE ROCKS

I READ ONCE – MANY YEARS AGO, when people still read things – that a simple trick to keep the mind sharp and help stave off maladies such as dementia is to mix up your daily commute to and from the office.

As I recall, the article said that changing your route every so often keeps the mind active and engaged. Essentially, when you change your daily routine, your mind ticks over instead of going to sleep.

As anyone who has driven the same way to the same office every day can tell you, some mornings you leave home and the next minute you're at your desk already replying to emails (or checking TikTok), with no idea of how you got there. This is the brain disengaging, to help you complete your daily tasks without expending too much mental energy.

Anyway, not wanting to get dementia at the age of 25, I tried this trick for a while; until I realised that actually, I'm a creature of habit. I know what I like, and I like what I know. (And in fact there were only two routes I *could* take to the office back then, and one of them added 20 minutes to the trip, so...)

It's the same when it comes to riding: as much as I love new routes and seeing new places (new faces, at this age, I can do without), there's something soothing about having a routine riding route, with the same riding group, on the same day of every week.

The routine ride is a favourite blanket you pull over your legs when the first winter chill hits. It's the go-to beer when you can't decide what you feel like drinking. It's that plate of lasagne after a long training session or a hard race. It's a safety net; and for me at least, it's the most compelling reason I can think of to get out of bed.

On the routine ride with the routine riders riding the routine route, I know exactly what I'll get. I know I'll arrive at the first meeting point five minutes ahead of schedule, and that Jonno – even though he lives 300m from the meeting point – will arrive five minutes late, still pulling on his jacket as he barrels past the startled dog walkers in the subway tunnel.

I know that after three minutes of riding together, Jonno will look at my camo-style gloves and ask, "Dave! Where are your hands?!" I know that after another few minutes, I'll turn to Jonno as we move through the rush-hour work traffic and ask, "Where are all these people going?"

I know that on the first hill, Jacques will attack and Jonno will chase. I know that Jonno won't catch Jacques. I know that at the second meeting point, Chris will be circling the parking lot, ready to launch into another amusing tale about Jonno getting lost on the same route *they've* ridden for the last 10 years.

I know we'll all order flat whites at the coffee shop, and Jonno will interject: "Make mine a skinny!" And without missing a beat, Chris will add, "For the skinny *ou!*" I know the same waiter will roll his eyes the same way he does every week.

The route is the same and the people are the same (just wider and greyer each year). The jokes are the same. The coffee and banana bread order is the same (though Chris did order a little tart last time, which naturally created a new joke that will be recycled every week for eternity).

It's all the same. And it's wonderful. And my brain will probably cease functioning by age 47. But that's also fine. **B**

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As told to **DAVID MOSELEY**

THE MAN, THE MYTH, THE MOUSTACHE

MARCO JOUBERT, SA GRAVEL CHAMP AND PRO MOUNTAIN BIKER

DURING LOCKDOWN, while others were baking sourdough and Zwifting their eyes out, Marco Joubert was digging – and thinking – deep. "Before Covid, things were just starting to come together for me. Then everything flipped. I was still studying business, and I asked myself what I actually wanted in life. I thought about quitting; but then we started racing again, and cycling pulled me back in."

His current successes – a barnstorming third place at the 2025 Cape Epic, followed by a win at the South African National Gravel Championships – are the result of a three-year plan. "I didn't want to be that guy who peaks for one race and then fades. I wanted consistency, week after week. It's been an investment, and it's not always easy. But now I'm in a mental space where racing feels right."

After a busy start to 2025, Joubert took time out to reconnect with friends and family and reset his work-life balance, before embarking on his next round of racing. He currently leads the Trailseeker series ahead of teammate Tristan Nortje. With four races left in the series, we can expect more fireworks from the pair. Then, in August, Marco and Tristan will take on the world's best at the Swiss Epic. "That's a big target for us," he says. "We've shown we can compete on South African soil; now we want to show we can do it away from home, too."

I take my coffee… black, first thing in the morning, made with my AeroPress. I don't want to speak to anyone before I have that coffee. Usually one cup, max two. (Although at the Cape Epic, it was two or three…)

I'd love to go for a ride… in Longmore Forest, near Gqeberha – it's where my dad and I used to ride when I was younger. You can ride there for hours and you won't see anyone. I was riding there alone the other day, and an eagle landed right next to me and caught a little mouse. The isolation makes me feel like I'm in the circle of life.

The secret to happiness is… being content with your situation and your surroundings. You can't always choose these, but you have to find a way to accept everything and focus on the positives. It's human nature to push for more; but at the end of the day, you're often chasing unreachable goals. Rather chase contentment.

My greatest exhilaration… is racing. Especially at a race like the Cape Epic, when you're riding against the very best, locked in for hours and only stepping back once you cross the line. It's such a rush! It can be quite overwhelming when you finish a race like that and the emotions start to flow.

My fear… is crashing or injuring myself to the point that I might not be able to ride or be active anymore. If you had to take away the freedom I have now – if I couldn't go riding, hiking or surfing – I'd be pretty bummed.

A moment of pure clarity… is every time I go home to PE. I sit with my mom and dad, open a bottle of wine, and we just talk – about life, how we're really feeling. It's emotional, honest, and always gives me perspective.

When I wake up… I check TrainingPeaks and see what's planned for the day. I check emails (only once in the morning). Then it's straight to the AeroPress.

I rage against… pollution, and people trashing the environment. Nature has given me everything. Seeing people disrespect it? It's infuriating. If Elon and those guys want to go to Mars, then they must go.

I wish… sometimes, that I'd grown up in a cycling system like Belgium's, with clear pathways, federations and proper support. But then again, carving my own way – as other South Africans like Luke Moir, Candice Lill and Kim le Court have done – has made me tougher. No shortcuts. No safety nets. I'm proud of that. **B**

Image: supplied

Yes, the silent ride
does make awkward silences more awkward.
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As told to **MIKE FINCH**

THE STORYTELLER

NICOLAS ROCHE (40), GRAVEL RACER, TV COMMENTATOR, FORMER PRO CYCLIST

▲ **THE VOICES OF THE TOUR** NICO ROCHE AND ANT MCCROSSAN IN THE COMMENTARY BOOTH AT THE TOUR DE FRANCE.

NICOLAS ROCHE – NICO FOR SHORT – arrives on time, wearing shorts, sneakers and a linen shirt. He's perfectly groomed, and his smooth, veined legs suggest he isn't far off the shape he was in when riding in the World Tour for some of the biggest teams in the business: Cofidis, Saxo-Tinkoff, Team Sky and Sunweb.

It's February, and we meet at a quiet coffee shop in Stellenbosch while Roche is out visiting his mate, Lidl-Trek's Jasper Stuyven. Stuyven is doing his early-season training in the area, and Roche is more than capable of joining him for rides in between some down time.

At age 40, it's been only three years since Roche retired from a stellar 16-year professional cycling career to concentrate on his job as a TV commentator, while also building his own gravel team; and figuring out, as a newbie offroad enthusiast, whether he should compete as an elite or as an age-grouper.

THE BEST LESSON I LEARNT FROM *DANCING WITH THE STARS* IS TO BE ABLE TO SMILE AND CARRY ON, EVEN IF YOU MAKE A MISTAKE!

For cycling fans in South Africa, French-born Irishman Roche is the voice behind much of the international cycling commentary we hear on TV – his excitable Irish accent adding colour, insight and passion alongside the voice of his regular commentating partner, Ant McCrossan, most notably at the Tour de France. The duo work for ASO, the company that runs Le Tour, and their commentary goes out to some 13 countries as part of the world feed.

Roche's pro palmares may not match those of his famous father (Stephen Roche is one of only three riders to complete cycling's so-called 'Triple Crown' – winning the Tour de France, the Giro d'Italia and the World Champs in the same year), but they're still impressive: 12 pro victories, including stages at the Vuelta a España in 2013 and 2015, 22 Grand Tour finishes, two top-10 finishes at the Vuelta, and two Olympic appearances.

He's a household name in Ireland, despite having spent most of his life in France. His profile on the Emerald Isle was bolstered even further when he appeared on the local version of *Dancing with the Stars* in 2022, where he finished sixth.

On the 'socials', he has more than 140 000 followers on Instagram, and he posts regularly about his riding adventures while showing off his significant flair for style.

How did you get into commentating on TV? I have a great relationship with Eurosport, which started 15 years ago. After a race, they'd interview me for their post-race recap, and I'd often be a guest on their broadcast.

I guess being Stephen Roche's son helped your profile a bit? I don't think it made a difference at all, to be honest. It was just that I always made myself available! And I was one of the few pros back then who spoke English, since most of the peloton was either French or Italian. I always had time for the media, and I think I was quite handy with a microphone.

In 2018, I didn't ride the Tour de France; so they asked me to come and help. I trained in the morning, and helped with the commentary after that. That was my break.

When you retired at the end of 2021, was commentating the next step? Yeah, I had it in my head that once I retired I could commit to 100 days a year doing commentary. But it didn't work out like that, and I quickly realised that I needed a second job. That's when I started the gravel team, and started doing content for GCN on YouTube. My first Tour de France was officially in 2022.

Images: Mike Finch / Supplied

You're also still one of Bianchi's most noticeable brand ambassadors… Yes – in 2023 I did a lifestyle series for them on YouTube, around the Giro d'Italia. Bianchi wasn't sponsoring a team at the time, and I got a call from the global marketing director to do a series of eight-minute shows around the food and wine scene in Italy. It taught me a lot about being on camera, and I've been with them ever since.

And let's not forget *Dancing with the Stars*, in 2022? They approached me about two months before it started. I had nothing planned at the time, so I stayed with my grandparents for four months and got into the quarterfinals. The best lesson I learnt from doing that is to be able to smile and carry on, even if you make a mistake!

Back to the commentary. What do you bring to the party? It helps that I can speak four languages – French, Italian, Spanish and English – and because I've ridden 10 Tours, I can add a lot of value to what people see on the screen. I recognise many of the roads that the Tour de France goes on; I want to be able to bring the story of being on those roads to the viewers, using my personal experience as a pro rider.

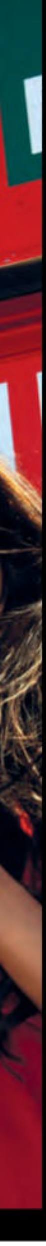
▲ **LA CAMISETA ROJA.** ROCHE WORE THE RED JERSEY AT LA VUELTA TWICE DURING HIS PRO CAREER -IN 2013 (ABOVE) AND AGAIN IN 2019.

Your fellow presenter Ant McCrossan is the lead commentator, with years of experience. What has he taught you? You have to prepare. We share a car; and after each stage, we review what we did that day. Ant is a real pro, and he's very demanding.

He pushes me hard, but it's like being in a team. He demands that you do your homework and get your research done before each stage. He's not shy to say, "You weren't good on this."

You do an incredible amount of talking over the three weeks. How do you manage it? It's easy when there's action; but there are times when there's nothing happening and

Images: Getty



you need something to fall back on.

When you get a 200km flat stage… that's tough. But then we focus on the culture of France – Ant loves reading up about the castles and the other historical landmarks in the area. We do a lot of research into the performance stats, and we focus on things like the equipment the riders use. We often talk about the specs of the bikes: discuss and explain things like shorter cranks, how TT bikes are set up, gear ratios, aerodynamics and all that.

There's also been so much change in the way the riders handle nutrition nowadays… That's always an interesting topic.

The broadcast goes out to various countries, and must still appeal to both casual watchers and real fans… It's a challenge – every year we have to start from scratch and explain how the yellow jersey works, but then also talk about more detailed stuff like tyre pressure, power meters and team tactics.

Plus, viewers dip in and out of the broadcast over the three weeks. Some just love the sprints, and some only watch the GC and mountain stages.

Thanks to modern tech, viewers get to hear conversations between the race directors and their riders via their radios. But we don't really get to hear the gritty stuff. Why is that? It's often delayed, so that they can protect the teams' tactics. The producers must be cautious about what they put on live TV because the teams have to trust that we won't give too much away.

It's still very controlled; you're not going to hear too many crazy stories. For now, anyway.

It's the same with heart rate and power data. It's fun to see, but we never see the numbers from the big guys like Pogačar and Vingegaard. People are hungry for data, and 99% of the peloton have no problem sharing their information. It never really bothered me – I always had my data open on Strava. But I don't see Pog or Jonas being so open with theirs, because sharing might give away their competitive advantage.

Does it bother you that a guy like Pogačar is so dominant, and has the potential to make the sport boring? Individuals have always dominated. It was Chris Froome for four to five years, remember? I think Pog has done a lot for the profile of the sport – every kid wants to be him. We also had the Netflix series. So I think the sport is in the best place it's ever been; I've never seen so many kids on the side of the road as I see now.

But such dominance also makes fans suspicious, given cycling's doping history. It's natural that people will look at Pog and think that. But there's no doubt he's created a new standard in history.

As for doping… I think the sport is cleaner than it's ever been. But it's always difficult to know for sure. ***B***

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◄ **SUPER DOMESTIQUE.** ROCHE RODE FOR BMC RACING DURING THE 2017 AND 2018 SEASONS, SUPPORTING TEAM LEADERS RICHIE PORTE AND TEJAY VAN GARDEREN.

Follow Roche on Instagram – ***@roche_nicholas*** *– and listen to him and Ant during the Tour de France broadcast on SuperSport in July.*

BY JON MINSTER

Image: Erlo Brown

◄ RIAAN LANDMAN FROM POTKOOK NEGOTIATES A TIGHT TURN ON 'BRAAM'S PLAYGROUND', ONE OF THE MANY HAND-CUT SINGLETRACK TRAILS ON THE FARM.

HEAD IN THE CLOUDS

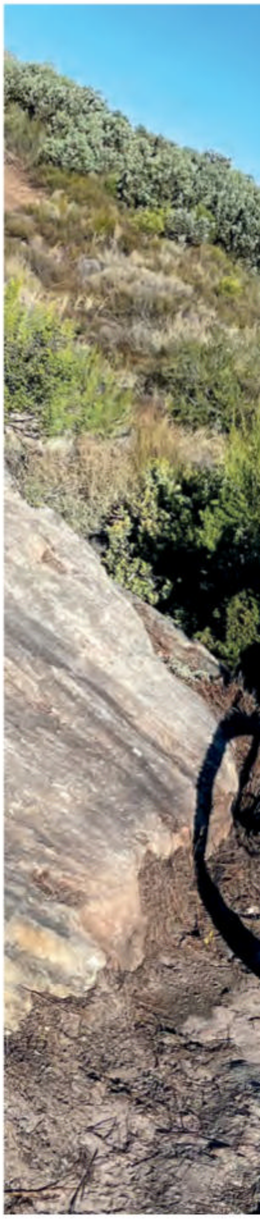
POTKOOK MOUNTAIN EXPERIENCE, NEAR PIKETBERG

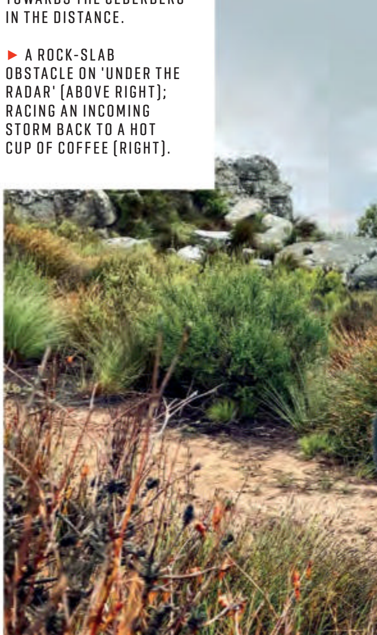
ON A MOUNTAIN ABOVE THE TINY SHEEP- AND POTATO-farming town of Aurora, with views east to the Cederberg and west to the Atlantic Ocean, you'll find a cycling escape like no other. It's called Potkook – after the mist that rises and bubbles around the mountain summit, like steam from a cooking pot – and it's a slice of natural splendour where owner Riaan Landman has cut more than 25km of singletrack trails that celebrate the natural rock features and the fall of the landscape.

And what a 'fall' it is… On the eastern side, the mountain drops steeply into Kapteinskloof; to the west, the view fades more gently across the Sandveld to St Helena Bay. Riaan's engaging, tricky trails take it all in. You have to force yourself to look up every few pedal strokes to appreciate where you are.

The trails are clearly a labour of love – they're meticulously built and well maintained, with myriad fun, technical challenges to keep things interesting. If you ever had the privilege of riding The U stage race in nearby Piket-Bo-Berg before it went on hiatus, you'll have an idea of what to expect.

There's only one road into Potkook, and it's steep. From Aurora, a gravel jeep track switchbacks up the mountain, all the way to the SANDF radar station on the summit. This is also an option for more serious riders – the climb is about 15km in total and gains nearly 1 000m in altitude. Aiming for that radar station feels like you're in some gravel version of the Tour de France, pushed to your limit on an HC climb in the Alps.





▲ THE VIEW EAST ACROSS KAPTEINSKLOOF TOWARDS THE CEDERBERG IN THE DISTANCE.

► A ROCK-SLAB OBSTACLE ON 'UNDER THE RADAR' (ABOVE RIGHT); RACING AN INCOMING STORM BACK TO A HOT CUP OF COFFEE (RIGHT).

You can also descend the mountain, loop around through Kapteinskloof and climb back up to Potkook for a 100-odd-kilometre challenge that will test anybody's legs.

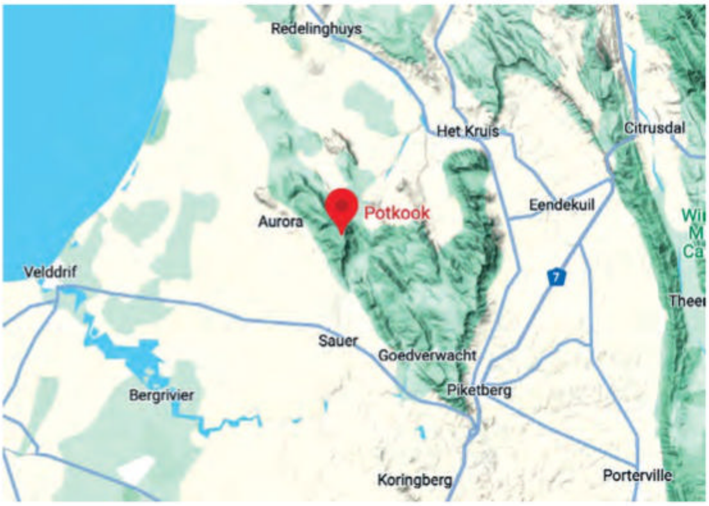
But the riding is only part of the joy of spending a weekend in this special place. It's a private nature reserve, and nobody except guests – and the owners of a few private cabins – are allowed in. Get a group of buddies together and you'll have the whole place to yourself.

Riaan and his wife Susan will spoil you rotten: the rate includes all meals (breakfast, snacks, three-course dinners around the braai) and all drinks. Yes, including the red wine you'll be sipping on the deck at the eco pool, watching the sun drop off the edge of the world.

Non-cyclists are also welcome. There are beautiful walks to lookout points and rock art sites, and trail runners will find the singletrack equally engaging and challenging. Birders will be in their element: you'll definitely see the breeding pair of Verreaux's eagles, along with other rare specials like the protea canary and ground woodpecker. Leopards are regularly snapped by Riaan's camera traps. And the accommodation is bright, contemporary and luxurious. After two days you'll wish you could stay forever.

Get a group of friends together and go and experience what Riaan has built in this secret corner of the Cape. ***B***

Images: Jon Minster / Erlo Brown / Potkook



THE DETAILS

WHERE? Potkook is about 180km north of Cape Town, via the N7 and the R399. You don't need a 4x4 to get up the mountain road, but a vehicle with high ground clearance is a good idea.

RIDING INFO: Only Potkook guests are allowed on the trails, unless by prior arrangement. If you ride all the singletrack in one session, you'll cover about 25km and climb about 600m. The trails are mostly separate loops with clever names, which intersect at key points.

Most loops are suitable for all riders, but there are some technical, rocky and steep ones – it's easy to exclude these depending on your abilities. You can ride them in sequence, ride the fun ones more than once, or mix and match to build your own adventure.

The Potkook 1000 is a real challenge; the descent down the mountain road is thrilling, and the climb back up is a beast. There are plenty of quiet gravel roads at the bottom of the mountain that you can combine with the Potkook 1000 to make a Big Day Out – on gravel bikes or mountain bikes.

ACCOMMODATION: There are six en-suite bedrooms in three separate units, with the option of two singles or a king-size bed in each. You can only visit as a group – minimum of six, maximum 12.

RATES: R2 850 per person per day, including accommodation, all meals, drinks and access to the cycling and hiking trails. Minimum stay two nights.

MORE INFO: ***potkook.co.za; @potkook_mountain_experience on Instagram***

le Tour de France

EAT. RIDE. SUFFER. REPEAT.

GO BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST CYCLING SHOWPIECE WITH SOUTH AFRICAN LEGENDS **DARYL IMPEY AND JACO VENTER** – AND CHALLENGE YOURSELF TO A MEMORABLE JULY, WITH TOUR-INSPIRED TRAINING TIPS AND A QUEEN STAGE CHALLENGE OF YOUR OWN. ***MAGNIFIQUE!***

Interviews by **DAVID MOSELEY**

Daryl Impey, racing for Michelton–Scott, powers over the line to win Stage 9 of the 2019 Tour de France, ahead of Tiesj Benoot (Lotto Soudal).

Justin Setterfield/Getty Images

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Tim de Waele/Getty Images

We're days away from that most wonderful time of the year, when nothing else matters for three weeks other than breakaways, attacks and team tactics. Yup, it's Tour de France time!

Praise that little 'minimise' button on your computer screen, so you can watch the Tour at work… And praise the French too, for inventing ruined castles, country *chateaux*, and the greatest sporting spectacle known to mankind.

"There's nothing else like it," says Daryl Impey, ex-pro rider and current Assistant Sports Director at Israel-Premier Tech. In 2013, thanks to consistently high finishes, Impey became the first African rider to wear the Yellow Jersey; and at the 2019 edition he won Stage 9. In all, he competed at the Tour eight times.

"When you arrive at the Tour de France, you know you're there," he says. "The Monuments are big. The Giro is big. The Vuelta is big. But the Tour is… bigger.

"The media buzz is immense; it feels like the whole world is excited. The teams all look smart – new bikes are launched, new kit is launched – and the magnitude of everything is on another level. If you have success at the Tour, like winning a stage, it can change your career."

Another former national road-racing champion who knows a thing or two about bleeding through the eyeballs on French roads is Jaco Venter, who raced for Team Dimension Data at the 2017 edition of the race. Venter echoes Impey's comments about the magnitude of the Tour de France: "The level of the competition, the people, the noise…

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▲
The peloton lines up at the start of Stage 8 of the 2024 Tour de France. Yup, Pogačar was already in yellow…

everything is so much more intense," he says. "Before I rode the Tour, I always thought, 'But *how* could it be bigger? It's the same guys I race at the Giro; the same guys I race at the Vuelta…' But then you arrive at the Tour, and everything ramps up to levels you've never seen before."

SOUTH AFRICANS ON TOUR

Impey says the Tour de France is what made him an elite cyclist; but he almost didn't get there. It's the same for Venter, who readily accepts that without the South African influence at Team Dimension Data, he probably would never have ridden the Tour. For most professional cyclists, being selected for the Tour de France is huge. For South African cyclists, it requires a near-superhuman effort to be chosen.

"If you're a South African, I think the main reason it's so hard to race in Europe is that there's no clear path," says Venter. "Every rider has a different story. I was lucky to have my parents help me.

"But now… it's so expensive. Where do you go? Everyone says you must go and race in Belgium. But the level is so high there that you have to win to get noticed. And besides, why would a European team take a South African over a local?"

Venter and the other South African riders of his generation raced in Europe and got decent results, but they could never take the next step. So, they came back to race at home; but then they'd fall behind the pace of the European riders.

"If it wasn't for Doug Ryder starting Team Dimension Data, I would have been out of the sport," Venter says. "None of what I experienced at the Giro or the Tour would have happened."

Impey's story is similar. After a few years of racing in Europe, he came home to race in South Africa. It took the intervention of another South African Tour de France hero, Robbie Hunter – who won a stage in 2007 – to get Impey's mind fully focused on racing in Europe again.

"You have to be determined to succeed over there. It's a cliché, but it's that simple. I was home in South Africa after spending time in Europe – a period of time I thought of as a failure. When Robbie won that Tour de France stage, I messaged to congratulate him. He wrote back: 'Why are you at home? Why are you racing in South Africa?' Robbie was the catalyst. His comments strengthened my resolve."

"THE MONUMENTS ARE BIG. THE GIRO IS BIG. THE VUELTA IS BIG. BUT THE TOUR IS… BIGGER. THE MEDIA BUZZ IS IMMENSE; IT FEELS LIKE THE WHOLE WORLD IS EXCITED."

Riders blitz through the farmland between Mâcon and Dijon in eastern France, on Stage 6 of the 2024 Tour.

Dario Bellingheri/Getty Images

Besides determination, Impey says, to succeed you also need a healthy dose of desire – and resilience. He notes that riders like Louis Meintjies and Ashleigh Moolman-Pasio have shown that it is possible to have a successful career overseas.

"A lot of riders go overseas and it's tough, so they give up and come home. *I* did. But I went back. I was determined to make it work. It *is* possible to make it, but you have to want it.

"I came from a good home, and my parents did a lot for me. But then, in France, I was suddenly cooking for myself, servicing my own bike, living with other foreign guys – totally out of my zone. You have to learn to push through the initial discomfort.

"Some of the young guys now don't want to put in the effort. They ride locally and they seem happy, which is also fine. But if you want to crack it in Europe, you really have to want it. It's not easy, and initially you'll get your head kicked in by the level of racing; but the smart and lucky riders will figure out what they need to do to survive."

TAMING TADEJ

You can't talk about the modern Tour de France without talking about Tadej Pogačar. With a handful of huge victories already under his belt in 2025, including Strade Bianche, the Tour of Flanders and Liège-Bastogne-Liège, the three-time Tour de France winner is the hot favourite yet again.

"Tadej is definitely the favourite," Impey concurs. "Especially since he didn't race the Giro. A lot of people thought he'd fade last year after Italy, but he didn't. He won the Triple Crown – the Giro, the Tour and the Road World Champs – and this year it seems he's even stronger."

Unsurprisingly, Venter agrees. "What Pog is doing is unreal.

> “TADEJ LIVES RENT-FREE IN EVERYONE’S HEADS. I ACTUALLY FEEL SORRY FOR THE LIKES OF REMCO AND JONAS…”

Looking at what he’s already done in 2025… You’d normally say, if someone has ridden that much in the year already, he’ll be tired at the Tour. But Pog isn’t normal.

“Jonas Vingegaard is right up there; but he’s had crashes, a concussion – it hasn’t been a dream build-up for him. Still, he and Tadej are the two clear favourites this year, as they were last year.”

How does Pogačar make the world’s best and most exciting cyclists look like mere mortals? For Venter, it’s simple: “He’s just better. As humans, we’re not all the same. If you want to level up, you can’t just work harder – you can have the same coach and do the same training as a guy like Pogačar, but you’ll arrive at the December training camp and he’ll already be flying. How is that possible?!”

Impey and Venter both agree that even without the might of UAE Team Emirates behind him, Pogačar would still be winning. “He’d get the same results racing for any team,” Venter says.

“It’s easy to look at UAE, their budget, and everything they have going for them. But it’s not just that,” Impey adds. “It’s hard to pinpoint why, but Pogačar would dominate in any team. Maybe not the same way he does with UAE, but his ability leaves me scratching my head. We haven’t seen someone like this before.

“There was the Peter Sagan era – where he could win any race he entered – but Tadej is Sagan with an extra watt per kilogram. He can do what he wants.”

How does such a dominant force affect the racing? Do competitors give up before the day’s riding even starts?

“It is a bit frustrating,” Impey says. “You can see it – nobody even tries to follow him. If you follow him, you’re doomed. He lives rent-free in everyone’s heads. I actually feel sorry for the likes of Remco and Jonas… The riders will tell their team directors that they tried to match his efforts, but they have to be realistic.

“That’s not to say that the other teams have given up. They’re definitely trying, but they’re getting bullied. The budget that UAE has, just for their riders at the Tour de France, is the same as Israel-Premier Tech’s entire budget for the whole year.”

With a handful of summit finishes (including Mont Ventoux), hilly stages and a mountain time trial, it’s fair to say that the strongest rider will win this year’s Tour de France.

“There are five proper mountain-top finishes,” Venter says.

“On those days, we’re looking at around 4 500m of climbing, which is right up Tadej’s alley,” Impey adds. “I think Remco Evenepoel and the usual suspects will be at the top end of the field, but I can’t see anyone beating Tadej. His team is so strong. There are four or five riders at UAE that could place in the top 10. They destroy themselves for Tadej; so it’s not just the world’s best cyclist you’re up against, but also this monstrously powerful team.”

THE LAY OF THE LAND

The beauty of the Tour de France is that the route changes every year. And with those changes come new challenges for the riders.

When the route was launched late last year, *Bicycling’s* review noted: “While it looks fairly mundane compared to the opening stages of the 2023 and 2024 Tours, the first weekend will be tricky for the riders thanks to tight roads, punchy climbs and a chance of crosswinds blowing in from the English Channel to break the race into echelons.”

Venter remembers trying to survive those frantic opening stages. “You just have to get through the first few days,” he says. “Only then can you make a call on the favourites. There’s so much adrenalin, so much excitement… It’s easy to end your Tour before

The elite GC group establishes an early pecking order on the Col du Galibier, which featured on Stage 4 – the first mountain stage of the 2024 Tour de France.

Dario Bellingheri/Getty Images

"YOU THINK YOU'VE GOT NO POWER LEFT, BUT IT'S ALL IN YOUR HEAD. YOU DON'T REALISE HOW STRONG YOU ARE UNTIL YOU'VE SUFFERED THROUGH A TOUR DE FRANCE."

it even begins."

When Venter raced the Tour in 2017, Team Dimension Data had Mark Cavendish and Mark Renshaw in their ranks. Venter's job – and indeed the rest of the team's – was to guide their sprint stars through the chaos, and ensure they were still in one piece so they could compete for stages.

For Venter, however, the excitement of his first Tour almost got the better of him. "There was so much going on! I was getting bottles and pacing the guys. Then I found myself in front within the first 5km of Stage 1. Everything was so overwhelming. There were people everywhere, and I was so in the zone that I forgot to eat or drink. I was asking people for water at one stage. I was on such a high!"

Another aspect of the Tour de France – something that caught Venter unawares – is the ferocity of the bunch. "At races like the Giro and the Vuelta, you ride through lots of tight, narrow roads. It's exciting for the individual riders. But the Tour is different – it's this huge bunch of riders moving in unison. It's very difficult to move in the bunch, so there's an enormous amount of pressure to be in front. All you hear on the radio is, 'Be in front! Be in front!'

"That was all I thought about in 2017, when we had Cavendish in the team. There are lots of straight roads in France. You might see some speed bumps and islands, but then it's back into the straight roads. You really have to keep your position in front – if you don't, you'll lose your spot."

What was it like riding with Mark Cavendish and his lead-out man, Mark Renshaw? Their skill and dedication to their craft left a lasting impression on Venter: "The sprinters are a different breed," he says. "You can have all the power in the world, but sprinting is about more than that – it's about instinct.

"That's why Rensh and Cav could float around effortlessly in the peloton. They had that instinct – something you can't train. They were crazy, too – if one of them crashed, they'd be back on the bike doing it all over again the next day. If I had an accident, I'd be rattled for days."

So, what's Venter's overriding impression of the Tour? He smiles. "The first day, your legs are sore. Then the pain gets worse. After a week, there's no more pain. Just... *deep* fatigue.

"You think you've got no power left, but it's all in your head – I had some of my best days late in the Tour. The main thing to overcome in your mind is doing the same thing, every day, for 21 days. It's relentless, and you start to think, 'I can't do it.'

"But you can. You don't realise how strong you are until you've suffered through a Tour de France."

GRENADIER
INEOS
BOLIDE

Egan Bernal cuts a lonely figure on a trainer, outside the Ineos-Grenadiers team bus on the eve of the 2023 Tour.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A TOUR DE FRANCE RIDER

WAKE UP

The mechanics are already at work, prepping bikes. Riders weigh in first thing. It's all part of the daily ritual.

"The first thing we did was fill in a mental wellness app," says Jaco Venter. "Basic questions that went to the performance team so they could see where your head was at. Then it was off to the doctor's room for the morning weigh-in. You'd also pee in a bottle you'd been given the night before."

BREAKFAST

Meals are often served straight from the team chef's truck, or prepped in advance and delivered to the hotel. Variety is not key, just consistency: rice with an omelette, porridge, toast, muesli, sometimes pancakes.

"Back then, we weren't overly focused on nutrition – definitely not as scientific as other teams," says Venter. "We were a sprinters' team, and maybe also budget-conscious. The chef would prepare food, then we'd drive to the start, which could be a one- or two-hour trip."

These days, every rider eats precisely-timed and measured meals, developed with nutritionists to fine-tune the fuelling. There's usually another weigh-in just before the stage.

It wasn't this precise when Daryl Impey was racing. "We didn't carb-count," he says. "Now the guys weigh everything. 360g of rice for today? Done. It's robotic."

ON THE BUS

For Impey, it was coffee time: "Straight Americano or espresso. Can't ride without coffee, right?"

The bus ride is also usually when team meetings happen with the sports director: course breakdown, tactics, rider roles. "We were focused on the sprint stages," says Venter. "Especially the last five kays. Cav and Rensh were very specific about which side of the road they had to be on."

RACE!

The real work begins. Riders race for hours, flat-out, up mountains, into crosswinds, through crashes and chaos.

POST RACE

Shower in the team bus. The team leader might head to the hotel in the soigneur's car. "Teams normally have two buses," says Venter. "The best one always goes to the Tour. Ours had one open shower with three heads – absolutely no privacy. There was a big sofa at the back, a small kitchen, and a coffee machine. In the last few years, the seats have really improved. These days, the guys have nice, big, reclining chairs.

"Depending on the day, we'd have a debrief – either on the bus, or later at the hotel. The director might talk to us all together, or one-on-one. We'd all have to use an app to record what our job had been that day, and how we thought it went. It was private. No one could see each other's answers, which annoyed me. Some guys got ambitious with what they *said* they did, because no one could really verify it."

EVENING

Rest, eat, rehydrate, get a massage. Sleep is essential. "I hated it, in the end," Impey admits. "I fed off the team environment; but once everything got clinical – scales and so on – I was seen as 'unprofessional' for not weighing my food. The new guys? They don't care. They'll walk around with a little scale like it's normal. Our dinners were simple and repetitive: plain pasta, chicken or red meat, veggies and salad."

It sounds like a relatively simple daily routine, but it's demanding. "You don't have time for anything personal," Venter says. "Between the traffic in the mountains, and the long drives, you sometimes only reach the hotel at 10pm. Sometimes I'd skip the massage and go straight to bed.

"Before riding the Tour de France, you need to make sure that everything is sorted out at home; because once you're there, you have zero time for anything else in your life."

> **"TEAMS NORMALLY HAVE TWO BUSES. THE BEST ONE ALWAYS GOES TO THE TOUR. OURS HAD ONE OPEN SHOWER WITH THREE HEADS – ABSOLUTELY NO PRIVACY."**

Marco Bertorello/Getty Images

TRAINING ADVICE FOR AMATEURS FROM TOUR DE FRANCE PROS

JACO VENTER,
EX-TEAM DIMENSION DATA ALL-ROUNDER

BE REALISTIC. I get asked this every day: “How many carbs should I eat?” Don’t worry about that stuff. What the pros do and what *you* do are two different things. Honestly, a pro rider and an amateur rider are doing two different sports.

STICK TO THE BASICS. You *have* to ride consistently. Don’t go and smash a six-hour ride and then do nothing for a week. You’re going to hate the big ride, and feel terrible afterwards. Just try and ride as often as you can during the week.

BUILD GRADUALLY. Get consistent first. Once you’re at a decent level, then think about getting a coach. *Then* maybe start worrying about all the extra little things you hear about online. But the main thing is to build yourself up to a solid level of riding.

> “NORMAL CYCLISTS ARE GETTING TOO OBSESSED WITH THE 1% STUFF. RATHER FOCUS ON THE 99% – YOU AND YOUR BIKE.”

▲ Jaco Venter gets aero on a BMC time-trial bike when he was racing for Team Dimension Data in 2017. Nice tan lines, Jaco!

Luc Claessen/Getty Images

DON'T OVERTHINK IT. There's so much information online and on social media. Most people don't know what actually works for them. You have to work out what works for *you*.

TRAIN SMART, NOT JUST HARD. Normal cyclists are getting too obsessed with the 1% stuff. Rather focus on the 99% – you and your bike. Train for what you're racing: gravel for gravel, MTB for MTB. If you think you're fit and ready for something like the Cape Epic, but you've only been riding on the road, then you're not ready. Try to simulate race conditions in training, as best as possible. Don't try new stuff on race day.

FIND THE RIGHT COACH. Choose someone balanced. It's not just about the programme, it's about the relationship. Anyone can follow a set of drills or do what a coach tells them to do; but without feedback, there will be no improvement. On that note, take your recovery seriously – you can't just smash every session.

MAKE IT FUN. If you're not having fun, you won't enjoy riding. It's that simple. If you're doing the same thing every day, you'll tune out mentally. Mix it up.

BOTTOM LINE? Figure out what works for you. Not everything works for everyone. Try it, test it, learn from it.

DARYL IMPEY, TOUR DE FRANCE STAGE WINNER AND YELLOW JERSEY-WEARER

CONSISTENCY IS KING. That's what makes you a better cyclist. It doesn't matter if it's two hours or half an hour of riding – just get out there and ride your bike. Four one-hour rides in a week are better than one four-hour monster. Regular time on the bike is what helps build your engine. There are no quick fixes, no shortcuts. Just get out and ride.

FORGET THE FOOD SCALE. You don't need to weigh your rice or buy an ultra-lightweight bike. The real gains come from building your engine. Nutrition, gear… those 1% gains come later. If you're training for an event – anything from the Cycle Tour to the Cape Epic – it always starts with the basics.

SURROUND YOURSELF WITH GOOD PEOPLE. The people you ride with matter. Find a group that motivates you, makes it fun, and gives you a reason to show up. Keep your routes interesting. People tend to ride their favourite routes, and that's fine; just make sure it's a route that you enjoy.

SET A GOAL – AND WRITE IT DOWN. Put it on the calendar. Even I need that now. Without a goal, it's hard to get going.

ENJOY THE RIDE. Not every ride has to be competitive. I confess, this is something I struggle with every now and then, because I'm competitive by nature. But I've learned to just enjoy my riding now. When I rode the Cape Epic with David Higgs, I had a lot of fun, because I was taking it easy. [*David might think differently… – Ed.*]

Sometimes, I do 20 or 30km, and that's enough. One ride, I got dropped. My mates loved it! It just proves that I don't need to suffer on every ride anymore.

TRAIN ON YOUR TERMS. Choose your days. Ride hard when you feel like it. Don't get caught up in crazy group dynamics where you're 'racing' on every training ride. You're not getting paid to race; enjoy the privilege of riding for fun.

ALBI
ORICA GreenEDGE
LCL
le Tour de France 100
le coq sportif

▼ Daryl Impey, riding for Orica-GreenEDGE, takes to the podium after Stage 7 of the 2013 Tour de France, as the first African rider to wear (and retain) the *maillot jaune.*

> **"JUST GET OUT THERE AND RIDE YOUR BIKE. FOUR ONE-HOUR RIDES IN A WEEK ARE BETTER THAN ONE FOUR-HOUR MONSTER."**

Doug Pensinger, Etienne Garnier/Getty Images

DARYL IMPEY'S TOUR DE FRANCE CHALLENGE

THINK YOU'VE GOT WHAT IT TAKES TO RIDE LIKE THE PROS? TOUR DE FRANCE STAGE WINNER DARYL IMPEY HAS COOKED UP A FEW CHALLENGES THAT WILL LET YOU EXPERIENCE THE GRIND, GLORY AND GROUP-RIDE GOSSIP OF A GRAND TOUR.

THE CLIMBING CHALLENGE

Find a climb close to your home. It doesn't have to be outrageously steep, just something that you classify as a climb. Distance-wise, aim for something 2 to 3km long.

On day one of the Tour, ride the climb once. On day two, ride the climb twice; on day three, ride the climb three times. Keep going.

On day 21, you'll ride the climb 21 times. You're going to be climbing around 40 to 60km, and you should gain about 4 500m of elevation.

If you challenge yourself to something like this, you'll have experienced the same kind of emotional rollercoaster that Tour de France riders experience. By the end, you'll reach your own Champs-Élysées!

THE ONE-DAY CHALLENGE

Pick any day of the Tour and try to match it – distance and elevation. If you really want to put yourself through the wringer, look no further than this year's Queen Stage. In 2025, it's Stage 18: 171km long, featuring the Col de la Madeleine (19.2km), Col du Glandon (21.7km) and Col de la Loze (26.2km) – nearly 70km of climbing, with a staggering 5 500m of elevation gain.

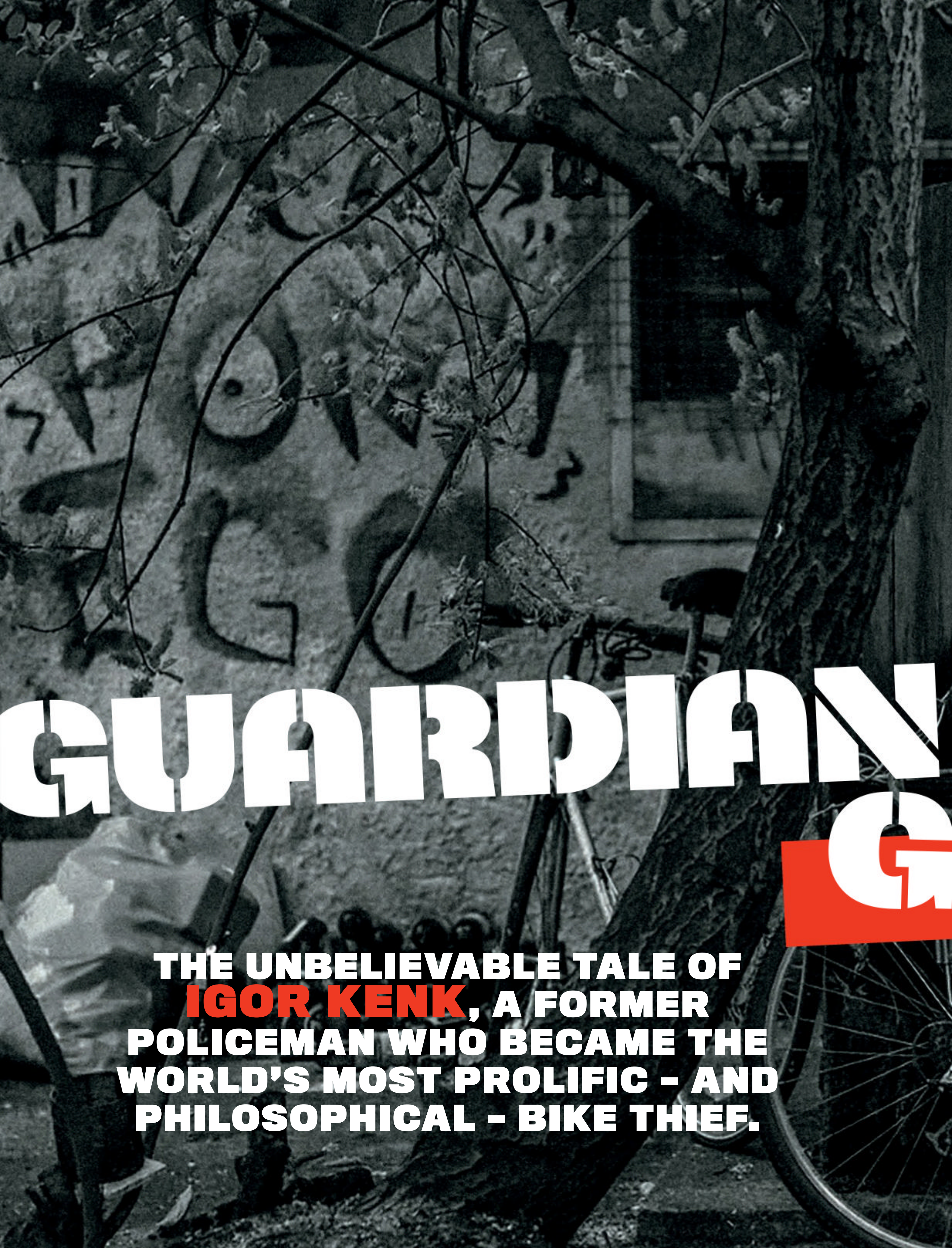
Of course, if you have all the time in the world, you can try and replicate the entire stage. If there are no big climbs on your local ride, however, find a 3km hill at about 5% – and ride it 24 times!

THE MINI TOUR CHALLENGE

Ride all 21 days of the Tour, at a reduced distance. [*Because you still have to go to work. – Ed.*]

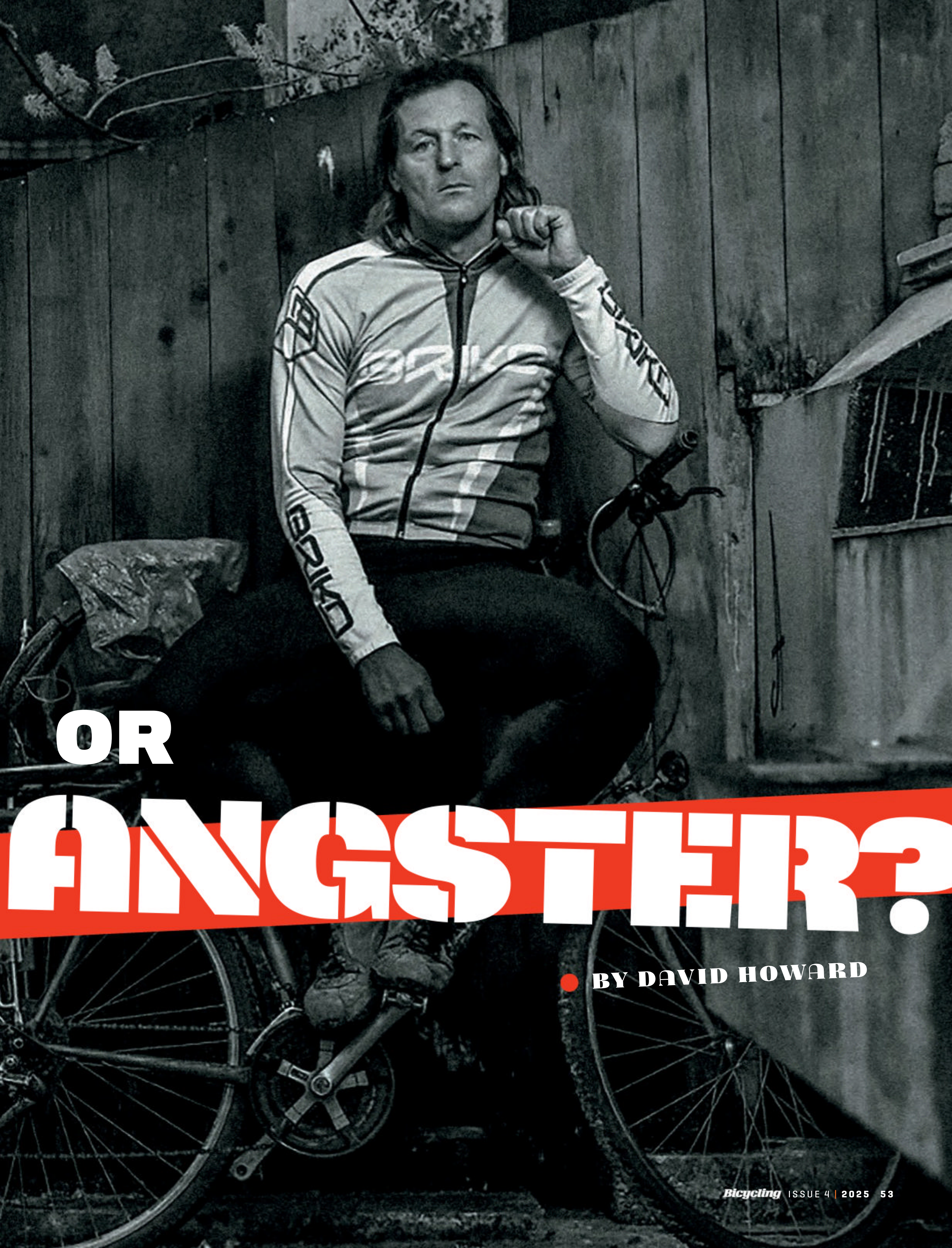
There are two ways to do this. You can either take the first number off the stage distance – if Stage 2 is 212km, for example, take away the 2 to give yourself 12km for the day. Or, if you're feeling brave, remove 100km from the daily distance. Again, if Stage 2 is 212km, then your ride that day must be 112km.

The time-trial days are short already, so you can simply replicate those. Stage 13 is an 11km uphill time trial. Race that stage with your friends, and your lungs will definitely be bursting! **B**



GUARDIAN G

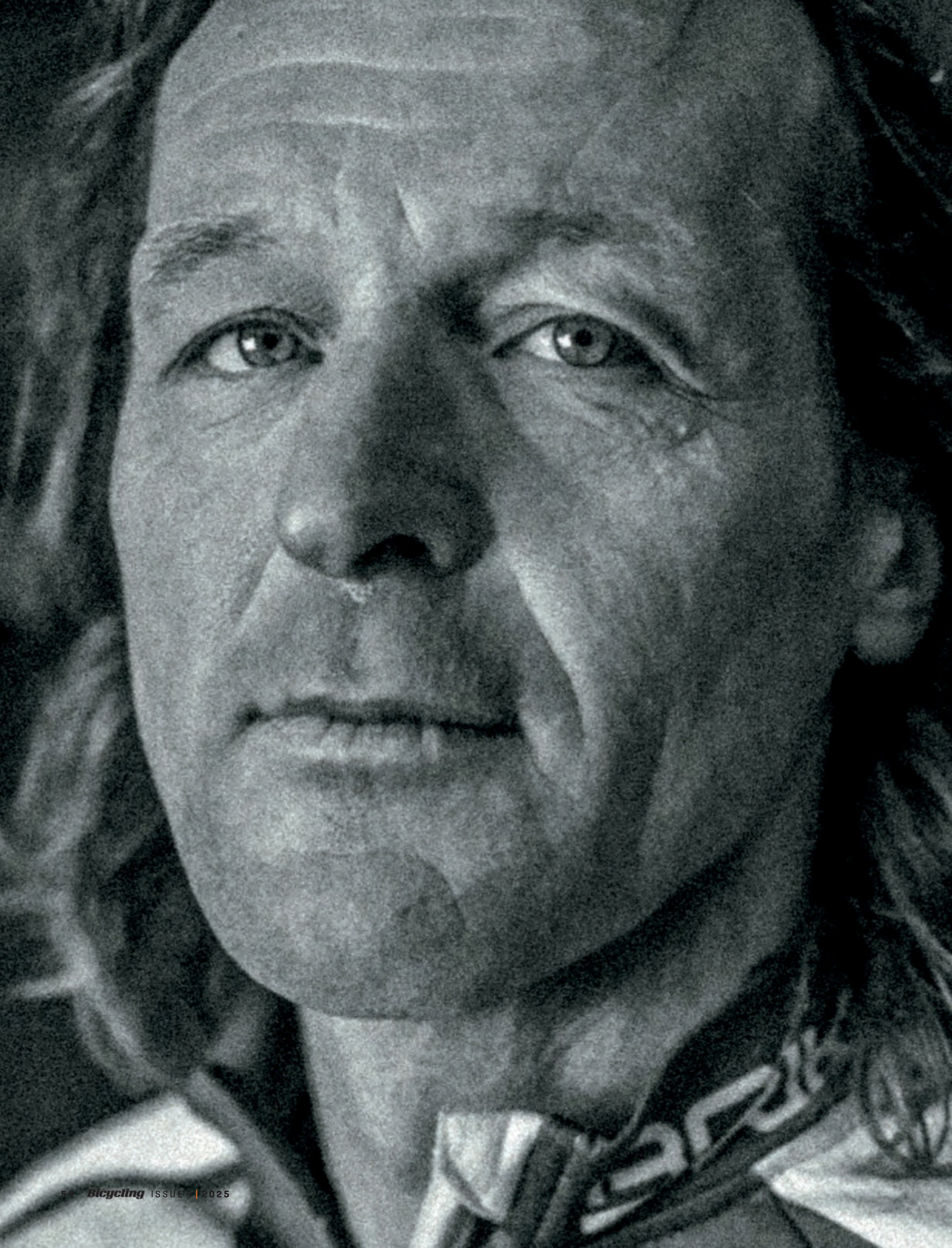
THE UNBELIEVABLE TALE OF IGOR KENK, A FORMER POLICEMAN WHO BECAME THE WORLD'S MOST PROLIFIC – AND PHILOSOPHICAL – BIKE THIEF.



OR

ANGSTER?

BY DAVID HOWARD



IGOR WASN'T THERE.

He'd called just seconds ago, but now he was gone. I stood outside the door of my room in a brightly coloured hostel in Ljubljana, Slovenia, saying, "Hello? Igor? Hello?" into my phone. There was no reply.

Igor had recommended the hostel, which was sculpted out of the hollowed remains of a Communist-era prison. Maybe that was meant to be a winking endorsement – a lodging where you can lock yourself up for the night using the still-intact bars – from a man who did jail time. But I detected no trace of irony.

"Hello?"

I called back. There was a ring, then a click, as if someone answered, then more silence.

I headed for the lobby. While I was thinking over my next move, I turned a corner and nearly collided with Igor leaning against a wall. He nodded, as if this was precisely what he'd expected to happen.

At over 1.85m, he was a striking presence: the thin, shoulder-length brown hair, the swollen hands of a prizefighter, the cinematic blue eyes centred in his craggy face. At 54, Kenk was both hulking and springy, even catlike in his movements. He was wearing black spandex cycling tights, and a green jacket bearing the brand of Italian sportswear company Briko.

I held up my phone with an inquisitive look, and he explained: mobile calls cost 11 cents a minute. By calling but hanging up before we connected, he could announce his arrival but save the 11 cents.

Kenk has said he considered himself a guardian of the bikes he accumulated. He once told a journalist, "I represent what the bicycle would want if the bicycle had a choice."

Getty Images

Outside, he showed me the bike he'd procured for me for the next few days. It was a lavender-painted Scott hybrid, probably 15 years old, flat handlebar, with a raven's nest of antiquated cable locks smothering the rear rack. Bungeed to the top tube was a battered blue umbrella, ribs poking out the bottom. Mary Poppins channelling Tim Burton.

Later, he explained its provenance. He'd purchased it in anticipation of my visit – knowing I'd need a bike to fit my 2.01m frame – from a guy at the Ljubljana flea market; or, as he calls it, "church".

"He wanted 50 euros," Kenk said, in his cheerful, melodious accent. "I said, 'Okay, buddy, I want [it for] 30, and tomorrow, a piece of ID and your signature claiming that the bike is cleaner than whistle.' Which, I didn't add, we both know you probably stole it fucking half an hour ago."

They settled on 40. I wanted to ask more about the deal, but that would have to wait. Kenk was already climbing on his own beater bike and tearing away.

IGOR IS A THIEF. Of course, right? Back in 2008, *The Guardian* labelled him the "world's most prolific" bike thief. On the sunny morning of 16 July, officers were conducting surveillance in Toronto's Queen Street West neighbourhood, according to police sergeant Robert Tajti. Cops say they saw a man use bolt cutters to extract a bike from its lock, then deliver it to Kenk in front of his shop, the Bicycle Clinic. They watched Kenk pay him in cash; then the man walked to another locked bike and repeated the process. Police swooped in and arrested both men. Two days later, acting on an informant's tip, police obtained warrants to search multiple rental properties owned by Kenk around the city.

Bonanza!

> “IT’S BEEN A DECADE AND A HALF SINCE HIS ARREST, BUT KENK HAS REMAINED A KIND OF CULT FIGURE–A SOURCE OF LINGERING ANIMUS AND DARK FASCINATION.

Officers recovered well over 2 200 bikes and countless parts. In the rented apartment he shared with his girlfriend in the city’s Yorkville neighbourhood, they also allegedly found about three thousand Canadian dollars in cash.

Kenk was charged with theft, attempted theft, possession of stolen property, and possession of burglar tools. Word of his otherworldly bicycle stash spread around the globe, and Toronto’s bike community howled in outrage. When the police put the seized bikes on display in hopes victims would reclaim them, some walked through teary-eyed. “I’ve never seen anything like it in 30 years,” Ruth White, superintendent of the police division that made the arrest, told *The New York Times*.

It may have been emotional, but it shouldn’t have been a surprise. Everyone knew Kenk took in stolen bikes. “I myself, among many other officers out on the street, had told people who had reported their bikes stolen, ‘Go down to Igor’s and see if it shows up there,’” Sgt. Tajti told me.

The trick was getting in. Kenk’s shop was so stuffed with bikes that customers had to navigate a low, narrow passageway. If you made it to the back, you’d enter a yard out of a hoarder’s acid trip: bicycles piled like teetering Seussian jumbles, even hanging in trees.

A man who knows more about Kenk than most is South African journalist and *Daily Maverick* editor-at-large Richard Poplak. He’s the author of *KENK*, a book described as a graphic “portrait” by its publisher, Alex Jansen. For the project, Poplak relied in part on many hours of film footage captured by Jansen and two others. “The shop,” said Poplak, “was like a piece of performance art.”

It’s been a decade and a half since his arrest, but Kenk has remained a kind of cult figure – a source of lingering animus and dark fascination, and profound curiosity about his motives and mindset. Kenk himself suggested he was preparing for an economic apocalypse. Others opined that he was a hoarder dealing with mental health issues.

I was just as bewildered. I was an editor at *Bicycling* when Kenk was arrested, and I instantly wanted to know more. I spent a couple of years sniffing around the story, and then I bought a ticket to Slovenia in 2011. The scenes and interviews you’re reading about here all took place then. I went hoping to make sense of Kenk’s rise and fall, to find out whether I could explain all that took place. But when I returned home, I struggled with the story. Kenk was a cipher, someone who was far more layered and complex than I’d imagined. After writing several drafts but never quite nailing it, I landed another job. The story was pushed onto a back shelf, and although I intended to return to it as soon as possible, I never did.

More than a decade passed. I still hadn’t finished the story, but I never stopped thinking about it, either. I would remember him sometimes – and this will make sense later – when I spent more money on something than I felt was wise, or when I kept my car running longer than necessary.

Then, last May, I came across a Reddit post titled ‘Igor Kenk back in town?’ The author wrote that a co-worker claimed to have spotted Kenk in a Toronto bike shop, using a pseudonym. Fifteen years had passed since he’d been pinched, but there he was. Commenters immediately launched into familiar opinions and theories about him.

No one, it seems, can quite figure out how to let him go.

IGOR IS A GREASE MONKEY, a social worker, stray cat, anarchist, utopian, communist, capitalist. He's a loser, a legend, a grasshopper, an explosive nonconformist, a sidewalk clown.

These are a few of the terms Kenk used to describe himself as we pedalled around Ljubljana back in 2011. If this sounds like a seething bundle of contradictions, well, sure – this was something he acknowledged, but didn't linger over. He didn't feel the need to explain.

We rode past cafés and fountains and scenes of quaint old-European charm that – having survived the drab Soviet makeover – made the city a sleeper tourist destination.

We talked a little as we rode, but it was hard to settle into conversation. Kenk buzzed aggressively over the city's sprawling network of bike paths, riding helmetless and fast, knees splaying out jauntily from the too-small frame of his faded green Peugeot. We wound up at Ljubljana Castle, a hulking edifice overlooking the city. As we locked the bikes together and walked toward its parapets, Igor described his middle-class upbringing. His father worked a mid-level government agriculture job in Tito's socialist regime in what was then the republic of Yugoslavia. (Slovenia declared its independence in 1991.) "My father had very high intelligence, but emotional quotient wasn't so good," he said.

Emotional quotient (EQ) is a measurement of a person's ability to monitor their feelings, cope with pressure and demands, and control their thoughts and actions. Kenk believes EQ is a far more useful indicator of success than the more commonly acknowledged IQ. He says his father surrendered to his fate, like a Tolstoy character – to a dull life far below his intellectual abilities: "Basically, age 30, he was finished. There was nothing left. Poor guy. So I ask mother, 'What are you gonna do?' 'Well, I would leave him, but these thousand losers who are all chasing me down are even bigger losers than him.' So they kept stumbling over this horrendous fate."

Meanwhile, Kenk showed unusual proclivities. Maths, for example. Starting when he was five, his grandfather brought him around to pubs, where the old man challenged patrons to wagers: could they solve complicated, university-entry-type maths problems faster than the little kid? Boris has 30 eggs, and he gives half of them to his two friends, who each give five of theirs to three others… "Of course, those drunks lost 20 times over," Igor said. "I just go, 'Oh yeah, the answer is 28. Easy.'"

Under Tito's brand of socialism, Kenk's family believed the best chance for a good education was at the police academy; Igor was accepted at age 15. He graduated, excelling in judo, but only worked briefly as a cop before becoming disillusioned and getting fired, he said, for refusing to go along with brutal tactics and rejecting communist doctrine.

"I said, 'I'm not fucking material to be member of communist party,'" Kenk recalled. "'I'm ashamed being piece of this organisation here because you're all fucking hyenas.'"

He eventually found himself adrift in Yugoslavia's wallowing socialist economy. Because of soaring inflation, goods were priced at three times what they cost in neighbouring countries.

Kenk decided to drive into Germany and Austria to buy stuff and try to sneak it back over the border. "I took as much as I felt was gonna pass," he recalled. The guards would stop him and demand a bribe, "so then we had little vegetable-market situation. He would say, 'I want 100 [Deutsche] mark.' I'd say, 'Sir, I didn't bring 100 mark.' 'Well then, fuck you.' They turned me around three times."

Kenk eventually snuck in thousands of dollars' worth of stuff every week – stereo equipment, chocolate, bananas – which he sold at Ljubljana's flea market, a place he still spoke of with ecclesiastical zeal in 2011. Earning a 30% profit, he raked in the same income he'd made as a cop. Capitalism and communism were colliding head-on, and he was happy to comb through the wreckage. "I was verifiably a legend here," Igor said. "I loved it. It was great. I knew this was self-destructive; but hey, if you wanna destruct society, be my guest."

Eventually he became interested in bikes. His first good one was a Miele with decent Shimano components for which he paid $800, and in what is either an ironic twist or a key moment in his origin story – or maybe both – someone later stole it. "Then I decided, I'm not gonna get myself nervous," he said. "Whenever they steal my bike, I'm gonna just throw a Frankenstein together." He soon acquired a German race bike – a Rixe, on which he installed Shimano's high-end Dura-Ace components. He also acquired a new city. In the late 1980s he moved to Toronto with his first wife, an Air Canada flight attendant. They split up in 1991, but he stayed.

After riding and walking and talking for most of the day, Kenk and I were ravenous. I suggested something prototypically Slovenian. He shook his head and led me into a shopping mall, to a buffet-type cafeteria where we loaded plates of pasta, cutlets of meat, and overflowing bowls of soup and salad onto trays. When I looked around for something to drink, Kenk beckoned me out of the restaurant and onto an escalator. We wound up in the men's room. "We're going to tomcat this," he said. He ran tap water into his massive hands and began slurping. I stared at him and he straightened, water dripping off his chin. "It's the same water," he said, a little defensively.

For reasons that will be clear later, Kenk left Toronto a wealthy man, but he acted as if he were destitute. He elaborated on this behaviour by sharing expansive macroeconomic theories and advice about the importance

Igor Kenk photographed in Ljubljana in 2011. His shop in Toronto was described by one journalist as a "piece of performance art".

IM TIRED

> “VISITORS TO KENK’S SHOP WEREN’T ALLOWED INSIDE UNLESS THEY WERE REGULARS, OR HE INVITED THEM IN.

of saving, and the foolishness of wanton spending. He seemed determined to bail out the ocean of capitalism with a valve stem cap, but he lived stridently by this code. “Every dollar you’re dropping now, for the next 30, 40 years would be compounding interest – so each of these dollars is hundreds of dollars,” he said. “But because people are imbeciles, they cannot understand.”

Too many people spend more than they have; which is why, he insisted, we are on the verge of a global economic collapse. Those who travel by bike will be better positioned when the world morphs into North Korea, he said, gulping his soup. For one thing, they don’t rely on a vanishing supply of fossil fuels. When he finished eating, he picked up his plate and licked it.

Rain was falling when we left. Kenk unfurled the umbrella he’d stashed on the Scott, then remembered there were two of us. Our choice was a dry hour-long walk or a wet 10-minute ride. It was an easy decision. He racked the umbrella and we pedalled off.

IGOR IS A MAGGOT, a hoarder, a human colostomy bag. These are a few of the ways Toronto residents described him, in online bulletin boards and elsewhere, after his 2008 arrest. Someone tagged his old building with the words ‘Centre for poor karma & pain research’. Wil Mills, who worked at Toronto’s Cycle Solutions, recalled the theft of his Wheeler aluminium mountain bike. “I remember seeing my bike lock in pieces and just thinking… Igor!” he told me. Visitors to Kenk’s shop weren’t allowed inside unless they were regulars or he invited them in. But by peeking over the single, boarded-up window, Mills saw his bike near the doorway. “I started hitting my broken U-lock on the window, saying, ‘Give me my fucking bike back!’”

A 15-minute shouting match ensued, during which Mills learned that Kenk believed he legitimately owned the Wheeler. “He thought if he had possession of the bike, it was now his,” Mills said.

After arriving in Toronto, Kenk delivered mail for Canada’s postal system and took on other odd jobs before he started fixing bikes in 1991. “I decided, well, this has got potential for survival, and potential for fun, so why not, right? So I just rented one room, and everybody found me there.” He ran his first shop, the Bicycle Clinic, on Queen Street West, from 1992 to ’96; then he moved a few blocks away on the same street to the building that became the seat of his notorious empire, in what was then a blighted neighbourhood. The place was called Igor’s Bicycle Clinic Co-op. Word spread.

Kenk asserted that his stock was comprised of bikes he purchased at yard sales and assembled from parts scavenged from the garbage at established shops. He came to believe that bicycles were the greatest invention in human history, and carry nothing less than the potential to change the world.

By law, as a dealer of secondhand goods, Kenk was required to do several things. First, when he bought a bike from someone, he was supposed to record the person’s name, address and driver’s licence information in a logbook. He was then required to hold on to the bike for three weeks and display it for the public, so a potential victim could reclaim the property.

Kenk kept the log, but Sgt. Tajti and others said he did not always comply with the second part. Without physical access to the store, the odds of spotting a stolen bike – much less being successfully reunited with it – depended on many things, including Kenk’s mood and the comportment of his visitors. “How enforced do you think that rule was?” said Eric Kamphof, then the CEO and general manager of a shop called Curbside Cycle. He, too, was turned away from Kenk’s door after a handful of his customers′ bikes were stolen. Several of them managed to get their bikes back from the clinic. Kamphof explained how the process worked. “You usually had to [say something] like, ‘Oh, I’m looking for a bike.’ And then you get in there and see yours and you’d be like, ‘Oh, that’s my bike.’ They’d make their case, and sometimes he’d be amenable; other times he’d be a jerk.”

One cyclist, Ryan O’Brien, said a friend spotted O′Brien′s stolen bike in Kenk’s shop and they went in for it. O’Brien is a big man and he was not intimidated. “We went in and we got into a conversation with Kenk. It was one of those, ‘That’s mine, I’m taking it’ discussions. But after a short while, I started to realise: How am I actually going to do it? How am I physically going to *get* to that bike? I’m going to basically have to solve this guy’s hoarding problem before I can get my bike back.”

Kenk acknowledged that he was fickle. “First five seconds when people open their mouth, you see what state of disrespect they’re operating with,” he said. “I’m thinking, Well, this is lost game. This guy is disrespectful to himself, so therefore even if he wanted to, he cannot respect some greasy monkey such as myself.”

As for the shop’s chaotic state? “It’s a little bit of a protest, my shop,” Kenk said. “When they ask me, ‘Why do you have all this shit?’ I say, ‘I don’t have nothing. It’s not mine, it’s your shit. The world is throwing stuff around, so I’m protesting. You can’t enter into shop, because I disagree with producing things that people get and don’t need.’”

Richard Poplak, the journalist, had heard this before. “There’s nothing he does that he can’t intellectualise in a very sneaky and manipulative way,” he said. A good example is Kenk’s claim that he held onto bikes for three weeks, when the reality was that almost no one would have any way of knowing they were in his shop. “It was a letter-of-the-law versus spirit-of-the-law thing,” Poplak said.

Then there was the way Kenk changed parts on bikes – putting a new saddle or different wheels on a new find. He said he did it so that if people came in claiming a stolen bike, he could test their knowledge: what do you notice that’s different here? If they couldn’t pass his test, he refused to return it. “Igor treated bikes like a Lego system,” Sgt. Tajti said. “It was easy to bolt these wheels onto that frame using that handlebar and that seat, and create a de facto new bike.” This made it hard for bike owners to identify whether a bike was theirs.

What seemed to really rankle people was that Kenk did all this brazenly, even theatrically. His otherness mystified people, made him into a kind of flesh-and-blood urban legend. Several cyclists I met there had picked up apocryphal details of Kenk’s back story: one described him as a bike racer from Czechoslovakia who was married to a musician. Few knew him, but everyone knew *of* him.

Here’s the hard part to square: Kenk’s shop was popular. He had loyal patrons, and the Bicycle Clinic never lacked for foot traffic. He believed the upkeep of a bike for most casual riders was needlessly expensive, so he offered free maintenance classes. He also created his own bikeshare programme: for $20, customers could take one of his bicycles for a year, free upkeep included. If they wanted to bring it back, he would refund their money. Kenk has an excellent memory, so if he saw someone bring in a regular customer’s bike, he would grab it back and call them to retrieve it.

Bike owners blamed the cops for allowing Kenk to operate. Cops, in turn, blamed the bike owners, and the system. “The thing with secondhand pawn shops is they’re essentially licensed purveyors of stolen property,” Tajti said.

For big-city police departments dealing with murders, sexual assaults and other violent crime, bike theft will never be a high priority – “especially when we have an apathetic victim base,” Tajti said. “We offer them free bike registration so that if we recover [bikes] we can source them back.”

But most bike owners didn’t bother, and simply considered theft a part of life. “It was the cost of doing business in Toronto,” Tajti said. “You buy a bike, you keep it for a year, somebody steals it, you get another bike. It was just the thing to do. Or, you get your bike stolen, you go to a place like Igor’s because you can’t afford to get a new bike, so you buy somebody else’s stolen bike. So now they’re being victimised, but they’re being complicit with the victimisation of their neighbour.”

The question was whether there was any way to create a different result, and whether Kenk’s shop might have played a role in that. Reading *KENK*, Poplak’s graphic novel, Kamphof – the ex-CEO of Curbside Cycle – was struck that the circles on the Venn diagram of their worlds may have overlapped. “What I loved about reading the book was that he loves the bicycle,” Kamphof said. “So I have a lot in common with the guy. I believe the bicycle can change cities, and *he* believed that too.”

IGOR IS AN ENVIRONMENTALIST, but not in the way that most people are, including me. You know, the people who stridently declare they want to reduce their impact on the planet, but fall short of taking the actual steps to back it up. Yes, we recycle diligently; but we keep flying, keep thoughtlessly going about our high-consumption routines.

Not long after he served his sentence in Toronto, Kenk moved back to Slovenia where he seemed to have resettled into a new life. During my visit, he carried around a plastic bag that he stuffed with litter he picked up everywhere we went. His new girlfriend, Sveta, a shy graphic designer in her 50s who spoke little English, confirmed with a roll of her eyes that he wasn’t just showing off for me; he did this habitually.

Once, we stopped at a pharmacy pick-up window and Kenk engaged in a vigorous dialogue with someone waiting in his car. When I asked about the altercation, Kenk said he had berated the man for leaving his car engine idling.

On the third day of our visit, Kenk grudgingly agreed to drive, because he and Sveta wanted to take me to Bled, a scenic mountain resort town that rings a lake where one of Sveta's old friends is the mayor. On the drive, Kenk explained that he considered himself a kind of social worker, and asserted that if he could only get people into his system – taking care of their bodies and the planet, correcting their profligate ways – he could truly help them. And, by extension, make a difference in society. During our explorations of Ljubljana, he confided that he'd been taking note of my physical prowess, or lack thereof. He felt that I rode bicycles too much at the expense of other forms of fitness, like tai chi and hiking on steep mountains like the one we'd climbed the previous day.

We met Bled's mayor, Janez Fajfar, at a pricey restaurant – his and Sveta's choice. Igor derided the place for being snooty. "You would not be able to drag me here with thickest chains," he said, teasing Sveta, who grinned. Perpetually the bombast, Igor sometimes spoke of women crudely. But he and Sveta held hands as we hiked the paths around Lake Bled. At the top of a gentle rise, we watched two people struggling to mount a nearby staircase while hefting bikes on their shoulders. One of them tripped as she reached the top step, her bike clattering across cobbles. Before I could react, Kenk was running toward them. By the time I caught up, he had helped the fallen rider back to her feet. He lifted her bike, gave it a quick look over, and handed it to her. She smiled and thanked him, then remounted and rode off.

IGOR IS A BIKE SAINT. That's how filmmaker Anthony Corindia phrased it. Kenk "coddled bikes", he said.

Corindia was an aficionado who had built up bikes as a kid. As an adult yearning to reconnect with his childhood hobby, he walked into Kenk's shop in the 1990s and announced he was looking for a 1972 or '73 Peugeot. Kenk waved him down to the basement, which was a riotous mess illuminated by a single bare lightbulb. "I'm thinking, Maybe this isn't a good idea," Corindia told me. "But he goes right to it – a '72 with a royal-blue chrome frame. Totally original." Kenk told him to come back for parts when he was ready to start building.

Corindia returned five years later with a camera, shooting a self-funded documentary about bike theft in Toronto. "I said, 'You don't remember me, but…' And he says, 'Yeah I do – Peugeot '72.' That blew my mind."

Corindia and I sat in a hotel bar in Kenk's old Toronto neighbourhood. He wore black-framed glasses; his dark hair was combed straight back. He spoke enthusiastically about Kenk, who gave him full access to the shop, allowing him to shoot about 70 hours of footage. "At any given time, there were five to 10 people around: street urchins, drug dealers and addicts, but also legitimate people looking for bikes. It was a circus: Kenk would be out on the sidewalk with a wad of money in his mouth, yelling into the phone, then he'd pull the phone away and shout at someone, 'No, no, that [bike] is piece of shit, man!'

"I don't think I've ever met anybody as magnetic," he added.

Thousands of bikes from Kenk's shop in the Toronto Police garage in July 2008. The first good bike Kenk owned was a Miele with Shimano components that he bought for $800. It was eventually stolen.

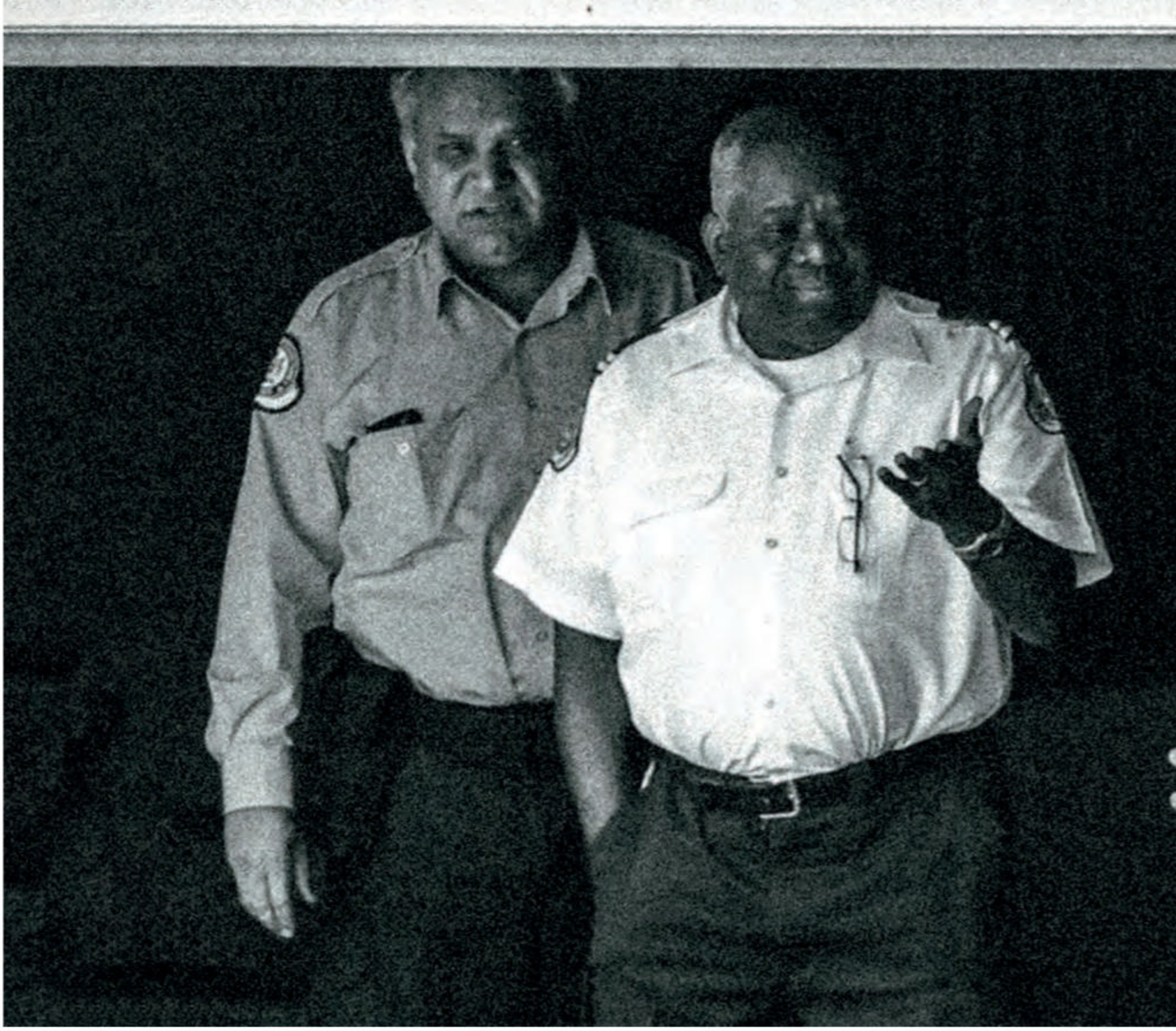
Heroin and crack use was a pervasive and overwhelming problem in Toronto at the time, and bikes flowed in daily from addicts seeking quick money. People brought fake IDs, made up stories. Kenk was an enabler, but no one saw him actually commit theft, Corindia asserted. "It boils my ass to no end, all of these idiots out there saying he's a bike thief. Why would he steal the bikes? They came to him."

Corindia characterised Kenk's shop in purely pragmatic terms. "It was a service," he said.

Kenk and his defenders pointed out that in fact, he collaborated with police at times while running the shop. At one point in the 1990s, the force assigned officers John Margetson and Vince Langdon to bike theft, and Kenk tipped them off when pricey new bikes came into his shop, after which the cops spoke to their connections in the bike community. A number of times, Kenk said, they successfully reunited people with their bikes. Corindia, who interviewed Langdon and Margetson on camera, backed up Kenk's version of events.

Kenk said he never actually viewed the bikes as being for sale, per se. "Things are being held until I find some kind of situation that's reasonable, that I allow somebody the usage of this bike," he said. "Meanwhile, I am perceiving myself as a guardian." He once told Poplak, for a piece in *Toronto Life* magazine: "I represent what the bicycle would want if the bicycle had a choice."

The circumstances of Kenk's 2008 arrest are worth pondering. On July 13, Brett Clarkson published a lengthy bike-theft story in the *Toronto Sun* that characterised the problem as an epidemic. The story included typically provocative quotes



from Kenk – "I'm a thief, I'm the darkest nightmare in the western hemisphere" – which was sarcasm, but his comments nonetheless encouraged Torontonians to view his actions as malicious. But the piece also noted that – according to Richard Mucha, the city's manager of licensing – Kenk was "operating legally and doing everything by the book".

Sgt. Tajti said police had a bike-theft sting underway at the time, involving bicycles left on the street as bait. He invited Clarkson along to observe on 16 July – three days after the *Sun* article hit. That was the day Kenk was arrested.

"Sometimes," Tajti said, "you catch lightning in a bottle."

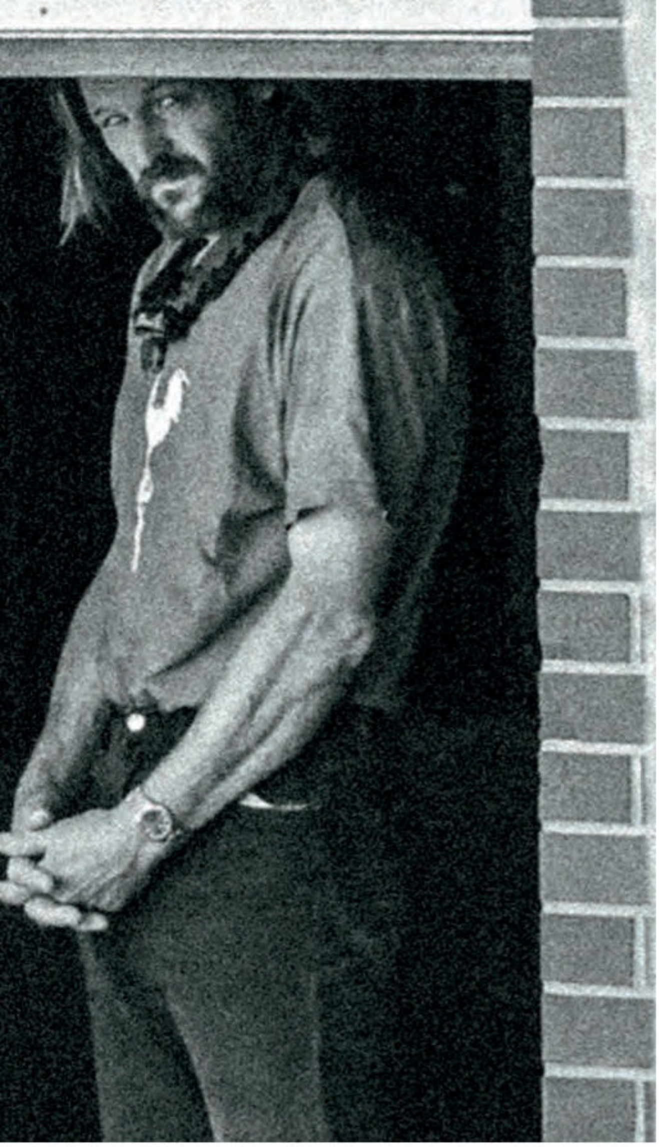
IGOR IS A SCAVENGER. As we rode around Ljubljana, he mentioned several times having 10 or so bikes in Slovenia, but he didn't elaborate or let me see them. Surrounding himself with bikes seemed a habit Kenk was unable (or unwilling) to break. Most likely, they moved through his life along with various other grey-market items.

On the morning of my last day in Slovenia, we rode to a shabby hostel with a common area that reeked of stale beer and armpits. We climbed a dark set of stairs to find the person he'd come to see – a man with matted grey hair, a three-day beard and jeans that sagged off his backside. Kenk wouldn't tell me his name. He offered the man a €50 note with some flourish, and they talked for a while in Slovenian. The guy disappeared and returned with a couple of jackets and an enormous plastic bag with a large hole that Igor patched with some tape, then stuffed full.

When I asked, Kenk said he was just doing some business.

Back on the bikes, we rode toward "the ghetto," an area he'd mentioned several times in previous days. He braked suddenly next to a set of four large, plastic, dumpster-like containers, looked around for a moment, then walked back a few metres and knelt. "Ah, you have to look from this angle!" He laughed and walked over to a tree trunk and picked up what he'd somehow spotted as the city whirled past: two beer bottles that turned out to be open but still full.

After we puzzled over the circumstances of this find, he carefully wrapped the open bottles in a spare plastic bag. He was already carrying the bag with the jackets, and when he subsequently stopped to pick up an empty bottle, he combined everything into one bag. It was about 8km to the ghetto, which turned out to be a quiet, tidy suburban



Kenk leaves the city's Don Jail (now decommissioned) after posting bail on 2 August 2008.

neighbourhood where we stopped at a house. Kenk explained that his friends, a couple, had bought it for a substantial sum and invited him and a mutual friend to split the basement into their own rooms so they could help pay the mortgage. We sat down with the couple, who appeared to be in their 60s, and someone pulled out a bottle of walnut schnapps and filled four glasses. It was 11am. They plunged into a conversation, in Slovenian and English, about the inevitable impending economic meltdown. A bottle of honey schnapps appeared not long after that, followed by bottles of beer. Things grew hazy and the conversation eventually withered. Kenk roused himself and led me on a tour, after which he offered a box of walnuts he'd picked up on the street. We headed outside, where a whispery rain fell.

I swayed back and forth in the driveway. The world looked warm and soft, as through a movie-camera lens smeary from raindrops. Kenk wanted to do tai chi; he'd introduced his version of it to me two days earlier on a hike. He had us face each other in a crouch. The goal was to try to make the other person move his feet while holding your own position. He'd invited me to be the aggressor, to reach out and try to push him. As in judo, he'd used my energy to try to destabilise me, grabbing at me as I reached out.

This had been engaging the previous day, when it was sunny and we were sober. Now, not so much. I wobbled away, trying to defog my head. Kenk didn't accept this. He followed, talking louder and faster, growing agitated. The world is a cruel place that can punch you in the face with no warning, he said. You'd better be prepared.

Standing behind me now, he bellowed that someone had a gun to my head, and I would survive only by fighting back. When I ignored him, he circled around and popped me square in the chest with his open hands – half punch, half shove. Instinctively, I lunged, shoving at him a little wildly. He grabbed my arm. I was wearing a light puffy shell jacket and he ripped the sleeve's lining. As he mumbled an apology I lunged again, catching him off guard, and he shifted his back foot to compensate. "Come on, come on," he said.

We finally stopped, breathing heavily and blinking in the steady rain. My mind had tunnelled to some other place, and it struck me that this *wasn't* just for fun. Kenk was indoctrinating me into his self-improvement programme – preparing me for the challenges of what he believed lay ahead; moulding me into something sturdier, more self-reliant, less dependent on the bubble-wrapped safety of consumer society. I was angry and sharply focused at the same time. It seemed possible in that moment that I understood Kenk better than I ever had before.

IGOR IS RICH. After his arrest, but before his case was adjudicated, he was released on bail.

As prosecutors prepared their case, Kenk initially refused any plea bargain. "I insist you prove it to me," he said, summarising his strategy. "They cannot prove a thing." He capitulated in December 2009 when they threatened to prosecute his then girlfriend, potentially derailing her music career. He entered a guilty plea and ultimately served less than two years in jail. Under the Civil Forfeiture Act, the city seized his two trucks and his possessions. The bikes, after a few hundred were claimed, were all junkers – worth about $10 each, by one estimate. But his building had grown exponentially in value in a gentrifying neighborhood and sold for $640,000 (CAD). When the government was finally done with him, they gave him about half a million Canadian dollars.

For a while, Toronto's bike community seemed to enter a period of reckoning. Tajti said police noticed that more people were registering their bikes. But some fundamental aspects of life stayed the same. Between 2014 and 2022, 3 000 to 4 000 bikes were reported stolen each year, according to Toronto police data. Secondhand bike shops remain plentiful.

Back in Ljubljana in 2011, Kenk was bored with life – forced out of the orbit of his own purpose. He was so frugal he could live off the interest from his windfall. He fantasised about working with bikes again. He had seen many bikes in the landfill in Switzerland, where he spent time with Sveta, a dual citizen. Those bikes would do some good in Slovenia, where the standard of living is lower. He pondered finding a sponsor to pay for the bikes' restoration, then bringing them to Ljubljana to distribute among people who could use them. Maybe set up a bikeshare.

He asked me what I thought and I didn't hold back: I told him it was an intriguing idea, but it was hard to imagine any venture capitalist signing on to any such thing with Kenk's name attached.

WHO, THEN, IS IGOR KENK?

Maybe the answer is all of the above: a grease monkey, anarchist, capitalist and so on. If he himself didn't steal bikes, he was the mastermind behind a system that encouraged and enabled the theft of bicycles – hundreds if not thousands of them. He was also capable of abrupt, unpremeditated acts of kindness, and was the only person I've known who makes it a point to pick up litter routinely for no reward or public notice.

In Toronto, at least, Kenk was a kind of mirror. Anyone who was being real about the Bicycle Clinic – participating in his ecosystem – couldn't avert their eyes from certain realities. Enter the shop raging at the world's injustices, and that rage would be reflected back. Walk in open to the wonders of the bike and its transformative possibilities, and you found an image in your likeness there. Come there seeking a bargain, a too-good-to-be-true offer, and you found yourself face to face with the ultimate opportunist.

Plenty of people patronised Kenk's shop; the sheer force of his personality scaffolded the Bicycle Clinic. But it took a customer base to sustain it. They entered with the drug users and the grime and the open embrace of chaos, and the bikes were a bargain, but the message was clear: you don't get to pretend you don't know what's happening here.

Back in Slovenia, sitting by the window overlooking Bled Lake in the restaurant he openly disdained, Kenk maintained his bemused expression as multiple courses were whisked to our table on tiny plates, one even delivered in a delicate beaker. "They forgot to bring us magnifying glass," he said, shooting Sveta a sidelong glance.

While they chortled, Mayor Fajfar picked up a copy of *KENK*, the graphic novel. He read out loud a quote attributed to *The New York Times* on the back cover: "What exactly was he planning to do with 2 865 bicycles?"

We looked at the mayor looking at the book. He gazed across at Kenk with freshly minted curiosity. "So," he said. "Why *did* you want all those bikes?"

Kenk's eyebrows arched upward and his mouth twisted a little – not a frown, but more a look of weary resignation, like the frontier preacher who lashes himself to the cross for his flock, yet somehow must still address wayward heathens. He pushed his beaker away, leaned back, and said, "Why not?"

IGOR IS A MEMORY.

For me, and for Toronto. More than 10 years after meeting Igor Kenk and reporting this story, it finally struck me what I'd actually learned in Slovenia: it was never about the bikes. They were merely one element of one man's peculiar and flawed but nonetheless fully-lived vision for how we might save each other from ourselves.

In the time that has passed since then, I've lost track of Kenk. Recently I tried finding him through Alex Jansen, the publisher of *KENK*, who travelled to Switzerland in 2018 to put together a documentary for the 10th anniversary of Kenk's arrest. He found Kenk living with Sveta and largely disengaged from his old activities, but he spoke of someday ramping up a legitimate used-bicycle operation that could help people gain independence and save bikes from being junked.

Jansen lost track of him after the pandemic started and had no luck getting in touch with him again on my request. I tried messaging Kenk on Facebook, which was also a dead end: Kenk's last public post was more than five years old. I tried reaching him through several other social media accounts that similarly looked long-abandoned – all to no avail. He seems to have vanished from public view.

But I like to picture him now, roaming the streets of some Swiss town, scooping up litter, plucking parts out of the trash to build a frankenbike, insisting not only on fixing neighbours' rides but on showing them how to turn a wrench themselves. And maybe he's still with us when we breeze into one of the many secondhand bike shops that still thrive in some large cities – places where we can run our hands over the frame of a sweet-looking machine that is somehow available for a bargain price.

This Igor will take a long, piercing look at us, then lean over and whisper in our ear: what'll you have? *B*

Kenk outside Toronto's York County Courthouse on 6 August 2008.

BY MATT PHILLIPS | PHOTOGRAPHY BY TREVOR RAAB

101 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT SHIFTING

TIPS, TRICKS AND FACTOIDS RELATING TO BICYCLE DRIVETRAINS.

The drivetrain on your bicycle translates pedalling into forward motion. It helps us travel great distances, and make a short trip across town. It enables high-speed sprints and long, arduous climbs. The individual parts of a drivetrain– chain, cogs, hub, derailleurs, crank and shifters – are found on everything from kids' bikes to World Cup race machines. The components can be extremely simple or highly complex; but to many of us, their care and function remain a mystery. Whether you're a seasoned veteran or fresh to cycling, you'll find something over the next 18 pages that will change how you think about your bike – and help you become a better rider.

1

The front half of a bicycle's drivetrain employs a chain ring (or chain rings) mounted to the crank. The rear half consists of a cog (or cogs). The chain ring (often shortened to 'ring') and cog are linked by a chain that transfers power from the rider's legs turning the cranks to the rear wheel.

2

The size of a chain ring or cog is denoted by its number of teeth (sometimes abbreviated to T).

3

Bicycle drivetrains are designated by 'speed'. Years ago, a bike with two chain rings and five cogs was called a 'ten-speed'. In modern speak, speed does not refer to the total number of gear combinations provided by a bike's chain rings and cogs, but simply the number of cogs. So, the current iteration of Shimano 105 is called a 12-speed drivetrain even though there are 24 possible combinations (2 chain rings and 12 cogs).

4

Modern drivetrains are designated 1x (one-by) or 2x (two-by). This means the number of chain rings on the crank: 1x means one chain ring, and 2x means two. 3x (or triple) cranks exist, but are rare on new bikes.

5&6

Derailleur stems from the French word 'dérailler', which means to derail. When you shift, you derail the chain from its current cog or chainring, which allows it to move to the next 'rail'.

If a bike features a 2x or 3x drivetrain, it has a front derailleur and a rear derailleur. A 1x bike has only a rear derailleur.

7

Bicycles that have two chain rings list them individually in product specifications. 50/34T is an example of a bike with two rings.

8

Cassettes are usually described with the highest and lowest cogs, rather than each individual cog size: 11-36T, for example.

9

More teeth on a chain ring means a higher gear – or one that feels harder to pedal. However, more teeth on a *cog* means a lower gear – one that's easier to pedal.

10

A chain ring and cog combination results in a ratio, or the number of revolutions a cog makes per one full turn of a ring. If the ring and cog are the same size, the ratio is 1:1. If the ring has twice as many teeth as the cog, the ratio is 2:1. The more times a cog turns per chain ring revolution, the harder the gear becomes.

11

Range, expressed in percentage, refers to the ratio difference between a drivetrain's highest and lowest gear ratios. A bigger range means more variation; a smaller range has less variation. A road bike with 50/34T chain rings and an 11-36T cassette has a 484% range because the lowest ratio is 0.94:1 (34T ring and 36T cog) and the highest ratio is 4.55:1 (50T ring and 11T cog): 4.55 ÷ 0.94 x 100 = 484.04%.

12

For single-chain ring bikes, range is simply the size difference between the smallest and largest cogs. For example: a bike with a single chain ring (no matter the size) and an 11-46T cassette has a 418% percent range: 46 ÷ 11 x 100 = 418.18%.

SHIMANO
ULTEGRA
12S 52-36 NH
SRAM 48/35T 12 SPD

13

Development is how far a bike travels, usually in metres, per one crank revolution. It takes into account both gear ratio and tyre circumference. The maths is a bit complicated, but as an example: using a 50T ring and 24T cog on a bike with 700c wheels and 28c tyres results in about 4.43 metres of development. In other words, the bicycle travels more than four metres every time you turn the crank one revolution.

14 /

Because wheel diameter partially determines the distance a bike travels per crank revolution, it also interacts with the gear ratio. That's why the same gear combination – say, a 36T chain ring and a 24T cog – feels easier on a Brompton with 20-inch wheels than on a Trek with 29-inch wheels.

15

A chain is made of links; links are made of plates, rollers and pins. An outer link is just the two plates that connect a series of inner links. An inner link consists of inner and outer plates with two rollers in the middle. The outer link is joined to the inner link by the pin, which travels through the centre of the roller. If you turn the chain on its side, it looks like a sandwich. From the bottom: outer link, inner link, roller, inner link, outer link, with the pin serving as the toothpick to hold it all together.

16

Some cassettes, usually less expensive options, are made up of loose individual cogs separated by spacers. But most modern cassettes consist of several (in some cases all) cogs permanently attached to a carrier.

17

Most bikes have a mechanism that disengages the drivetrain from the driven wheel (usually rear), allowing the rider to coast without the cranks turning.

18

Fixed-gear bikes have one speed and cannot coast. If the rear wheel is rotating, so are the cranks. 'Fixies' are often brakeless; riders apply back pressure on the pedals to slow down.

19

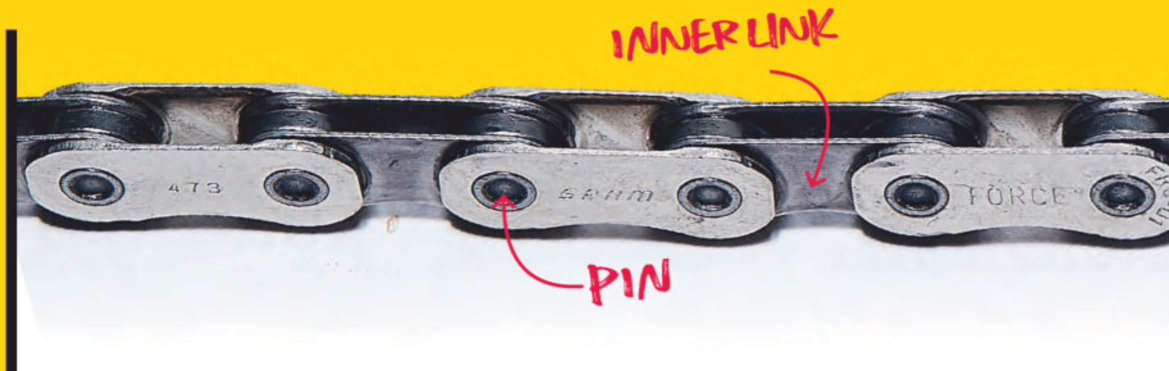
There are two main kinds of disengagement mechanisms: freewheel and freehub. The 'free' indicates that the drivetrain permits the rider to coast, which is why coasting is also called 'freewheeling'.

20

If the drivetrain's disengagement mechanism is part of the cog (or cogs), it's called a freewheel. Freewheels thread onto the rear hub. Freewheels were the standard for decades but were mostly replaced by freehubs. Today, most freewheels are single-cog, or are used for simpler and less-expensive bikes.

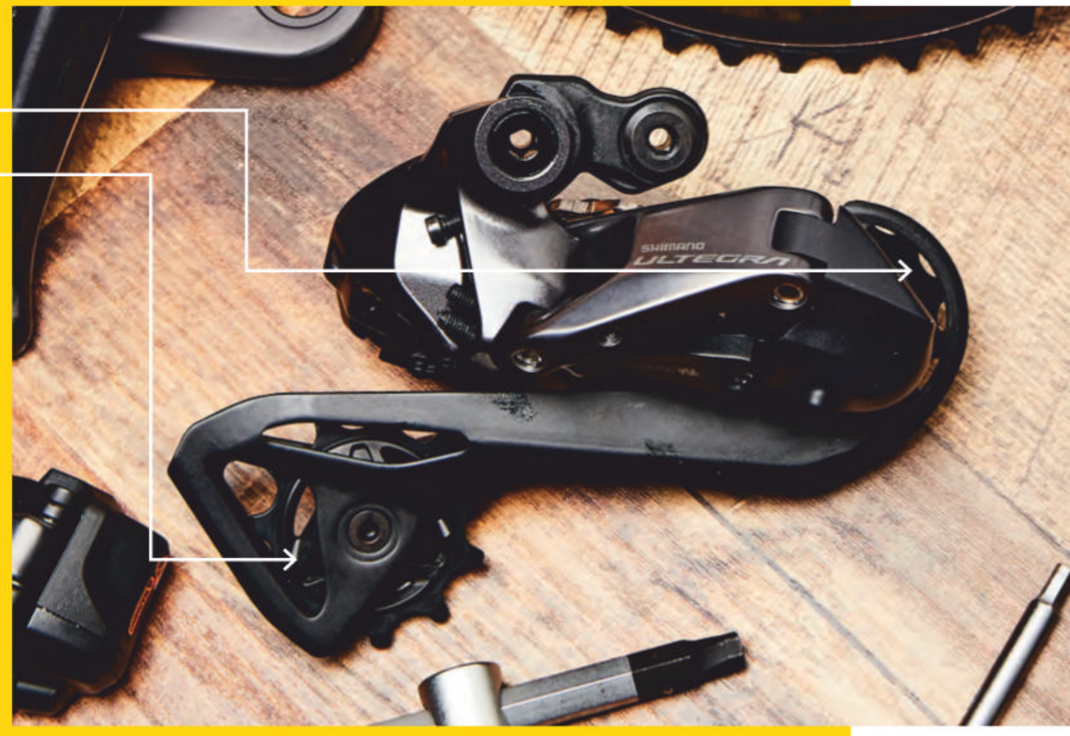
21

The multi-speed freewheel has largely been made obsolete by the freehub. A freehub gets this name because the disengagement mechanism is part of the hub itself.



22

Each pulley has a distinct job. The upper pulley is called a guide pulley, and the lower is the tension pulley.



23

Bikes with a freehub use a cassette. The cassette is a cluster of cogs that mounts to the freehub via a specially splined interface called a driver body. The cassette is held in place with a lock ring.

24

Over their history, derailleurs have taken many forms, but the parallelogram serves as the basis for modern derailleur design.

25

A rear derailleur's parallelogram is formed by the two links that connect the B-knuckle (the rear or upper knuckle, which also incorporates the bolt used to attach the derailleur to the frame) and the P-knuckle (the front or lower knuckle).

26

Below the parallelogram is a cage with two pulleys (sometimes called jockey wheels). The cage rotates on a spring-loaded pivot in the P-knuckle. The chain wraps around the pulleys, and the cage spring provides tension on the chain.

27

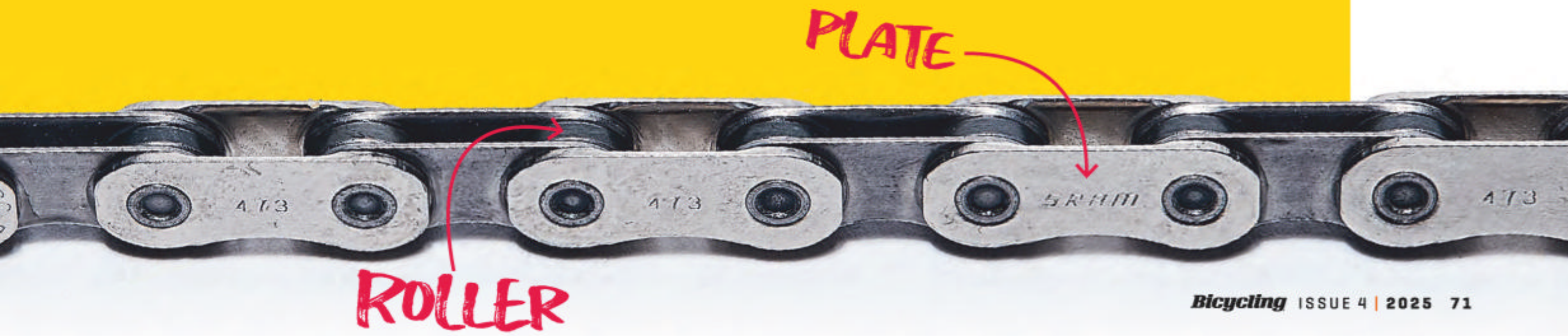
The tension pulley works with the cage spring to provide constant back pressure on the chain. As the chain moves to larger rings or cogs, the tension pulley rotates forward and spools out chain; shifting to smaller rings or cogs causes the cage spring to pull the tension pulley backward and take up chain.

28

The guide pulley initiates shifts. As the derailleur moves, the guide pulley aligns itself under the selected cog, which begins the derailing process. A rear shift starts on the underside of the cassette and finishes at the top. A shift is complete when the chain is fully disengaged from the initial cog and fully engaged with the selected cog.

29

Modern chain rings and cogs feature intricate details to help the chain shift up and down. Look closely and you'll see a series of ramps, cutouts, tooth profiles and pins (rings only) designed to interact with the chain. These details aid the transition from one cog, or ring, to the next by carefully and precisely picking up or releasing the chain. These details are why modern drivetrains provide much smoother shifting, especially under load, than older systems.



30

Rear derailleurs designed for drivetrains employing a front derailleur use a slant-parallelogram design. A rear derailleur built specifically for use with one chain ring and no front derailleur employs a straight parallelogram.

31

Though they still incorporate a parallelogram, front derailleurs have a much simpler design than rear derailleurs. Essentially, it's a hoop of metal (the cage) that pushes against the side of the chain to force it onto the next chain ring.

32

Front derailleurs initiate the shift at the top of the chain ring, and the shift finishes at the bottom of the ring.

33

A rear derailleur's motion is more intricate than a front derailleur's. As the rear derailleur body moves inboard and outboard, the guide pulley moves vertically to maintain a constant distance between it and the selected cog.

34

This distance between a cog and a guide pulley is called the B-gap.

35

Most rear derailleurs have a screw that adjusts the B-gap. A tighter B-gap usually results in faster and more precise shifting; but if it's too tight, the cogs and guide pulley will contact each other, which causes excessive wear and can foul shifting. A larger gap often makes a drivetrain quieter, but too much space makes shifting sluggish and imprecise. The goal is to find a middle ground that results in smooth and precise shifting. Derailleur makers have B-gap specifications in their set-up instructions or technical manuals.

36

SHIMANO
GRX
SHIMANO GRX 12S 48-31T NL

The vertical position of a front derailleur's cage is largely fixed and only moves in one dimension: in and out.

37

Shimano's first product was a freewheel, Campagnolo's was a quick release, and SRAM's was a twist shifter.

38

Larger-diameter rings and cogs have less chain tension and friction than smaller-diameter cogs, which is why they are more efficient.

39

For most of their history, derailleurs were actuated via cables. And while recent innovations are centred on electric motors, brands have also sold air- and hydraulically actuated derailleurs.

40

In the late 1990s, Shimano introduced Airlines, a 1x system designed for downhill race bikes. Sold in limited numbers, Airlines used air pressure to move the rear derailleur. Shimano said this system was inspired by the air-powered robotic arms used on its production lines. A metal tank – which the rider charged with a floor pump – was strapped to the bike and supplied pressure for the system. It had two shifter paddles: one for the right side of the bar and one for the left. Riders could select which side shifted the derailleur inboard and outboard by changing the routing of the air hoses.

41

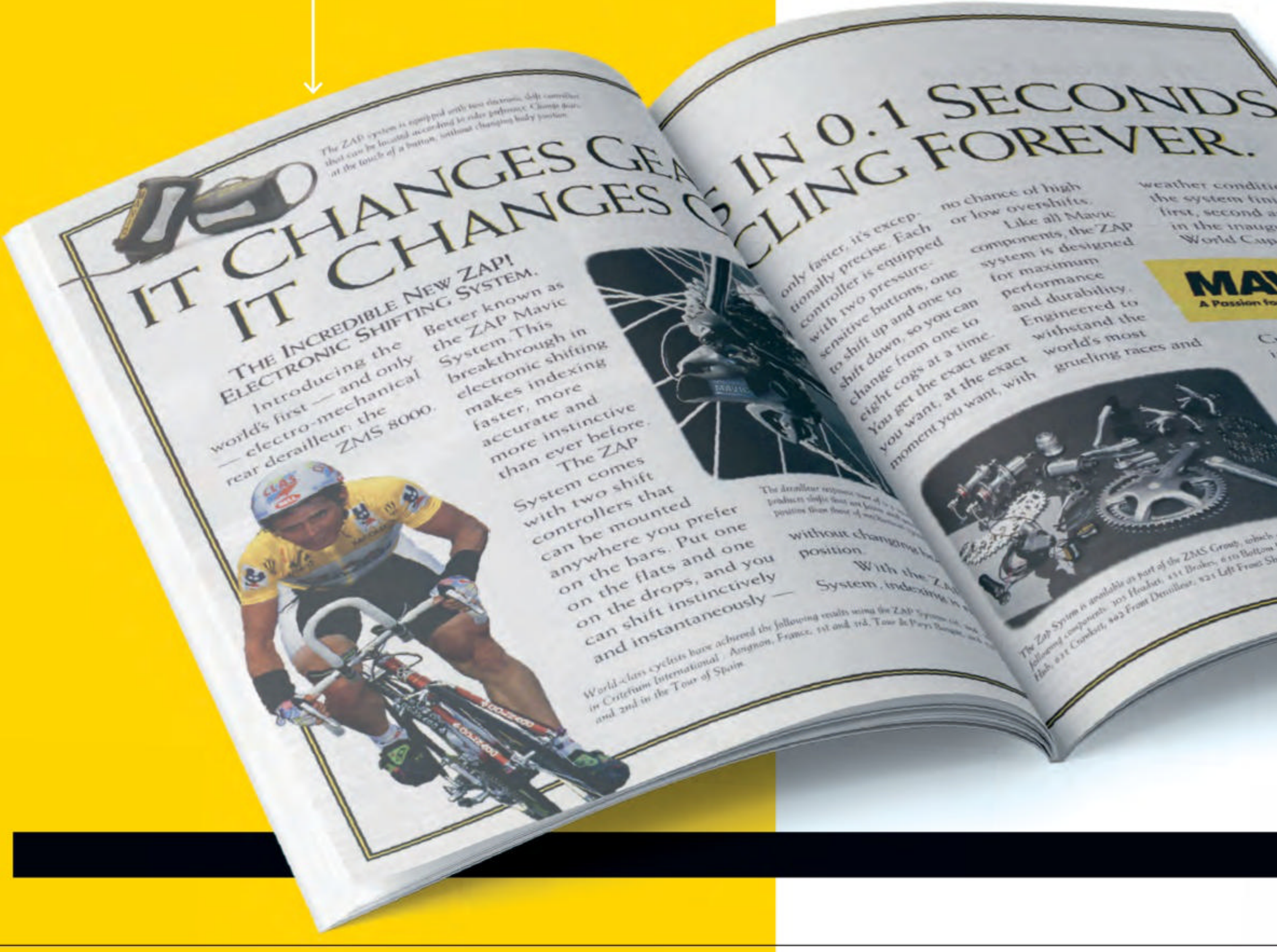
The first widely available electronically shifted drivetrain was Mavic's Zap, circa 1992, beating Shimano's Di2 to market by nearly 20 years. Only the rear derailleur was electronically shifted – the front was cable-actuated by a lever on the down tube. Despite promising features and good performance, Zap never caught on.

42

Mavic's second attempt at an electronic drivetrain was 1999's wireless Mektronic, which preceded SRAM's wireless eTap by 16 years. Like Zap, Mektronic had a cable-actuated front derailleur, though this time with a huge wing nut in the left brake hood. While Zap was reliable, Mektronic suffered from slow shifting and frequent wireless interference issues. It was forward-looking not only because it was wireless, but also because it incorporated a head unit that displayed gear information. Its hood shapes provided multiple hand positions (promptly banned by the UCI, of course) and multiple shift-button locations.

43

WHILE WE LOVE THEIR PRODUCTS, WE HAD A GOOD LAUGH DISCOVERING THAT SRAM TRANSLATES TO 'SHIT' IN POLISH. OOPS!



The ZAP system is equipped with two electronic shift controllers that can be located according to rider preference. Change gears at the touch of a button, without changing body position.

IT CHANGES GEA IN 0.1 SECONDS
IT CHANGES C CLING FOREVER.

THE INCREDIBLE NEW ZAP! ELECTRONIC SHIFTING SYSTEM.

Introducing the world's first — and only — electro-mechanical rear derailleur: the ZMS 8000. Better known as the ZAP Mavic System. This breakthrough in electronic shifting makes indexing faster, more accurate and more instinctive than ever before.

The ZAP System comes with two shift controllers that can be mounted anywhere you prefer on the bars. Put one on the flats and one on the drops, and you can shift instinctively and instantaneously — without changing position.

With the ZA System, indexing

only faster, it's exceptionally precise. Each controller is equipped with two pressure-sensitive buttons, one to shift up and one to shift down, so you can change from one to eight cogs at a time. You get the exact gear you want, at the exact moment you want, with no chance of high or low overshifts.

Like all Mavic components, the ZAP system is designed for maximum performance and durability. Engineered to withstand the world's most grueling races and weather conditi the system fin first, second a in the inaug World Cup

World-class cyclists have achieved the following results using the ZAP System in Critérium International, Avignon, France, 1st and 3rd, and 2nd in the Tour of Spain

Red Bull
SPECIALIZED
UCI MOUNTAIN BIKE WORLD CUP
1
LEOGANG SALZBURGERLAND
GoPro

Bartek Woliński/Red Bull Content Pool

44

Aaron Gwin's race run in the 2015 World Cup at Leogang, Austria, is among the most famous downhill mountain bike wins. Gwin broke his chain immediately after leaving the start gate, completed his run chainless, and won by 0.045 seconds.

45

Cross-chaining a modern drivetrain is fine. While more angle on the chain reduces efficiency (a straighter chain is faster), don't fret or obsess. There are better and worse shifting practices, but there is no right or wrong.

46

Cadence is how many times you rotate the crank per minute. 'Perfect' cadence is a myth, but most riders find that a seated cadence of 80 to 100 rpm is most comfortable. Shifting lets you maintain your preferred cadence as the terrain changes.

47

Higher cadences are typically difficult to execute smoothly when pedalling out of the saddle. Most riders find that a standing cadence of 60 to 80 rpm feels best.

48

Drivetrains with two (or more) rings have several redundant gear combinations. Using an 11-speed drivetrain with 50/34T chain rings and an 11-28T cassette as an example, the ratio overlap begins at the fourth cog – 34x19 is the same ratio as 50x28. So, while there are 22 possible gear combinations, there are fewer notably distinct ratios.

DURA-ACE
DURA-ACE
12S 52-36 NH

49

Derailleur drivetrains require chain movement to shift. This is why you must pedal to change gears. In most cases, you'll experience the best shifting with a brisk cadence (85 rpm or so) and by slightly easing pressure on the pedals.

50

Less common is a drivetrain where the *crank* freewheels instead of the cassette. With a front freewheel drivetrain, the chain, chain rings and cogs continue to move while the rider is coasting. This type of drivetrain allows shifting while pedalling or coasting. Front freewheel drivetrains never became as popular as rear freewheel drivetrains, but have recently seen increased interest among mountain-bike riders.

51

If you want to 'sweep' multiple cogs, it's best to do it at a quick cadence and with very little pressure on the pedals.

52

When changing multiple cogs under higher loads, shift one cog at a time, letting the chain fully engage a cog before shifting to the next. This prevents skipping, and potentially, damaging the drivetrain.

53

Shift gears with anticipation. While not always possible, shift into the gear you need right before you need it. For example, when rolling to a stop, shift to the gear you'll need to accelerate from a standstill. This allows you to get up to speed more quickly, and avoids low-cadence and high-load shifts.

54

On most drivetrains, the default orientation has the shift lever for the rear derailleur on the right side of the bike ('right equals rear' is easy to remember) and the front on the left. In some cases, this can be reversed, and it's especially easy with electronic drivetrains.

55

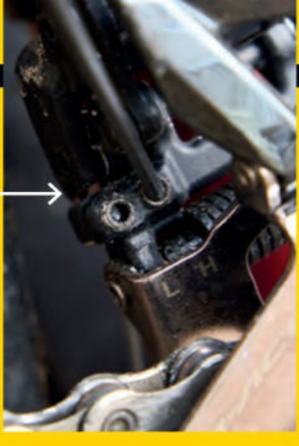
SRAM and Shimano electronic drivetrains for drop-bar bikes have optional satellite shifters with flexible mounting options. These provide riders another position to shift from (typically the bar tops). They're also great for adapting bikes to riders with hand or finger limitations.

56

For both derailleurs, moving the chain outboard from the bike's centreline accesses harder gears, and moving the chain inboard gets you easier gears.

57

Many derailleurs have limit screws – marked High and Low or H and L – that adjust their total range of motion. To remember which screw does which: Low equals slow, high equals fly.



58

'Upshift' means selecting a higher (harder) ratio, while 'downshift' means moving to a lower (easier) ratio. In front, these shifts are literally up (big ring, higher ratio, upshift) and down (small ring, lower ratio, downshift). But this reverses at the rear derailleur – an upshift means moving the chain down the cassette to a smaller cog; downshift means moving it up the cassette to a larger cog. Confusing!

59

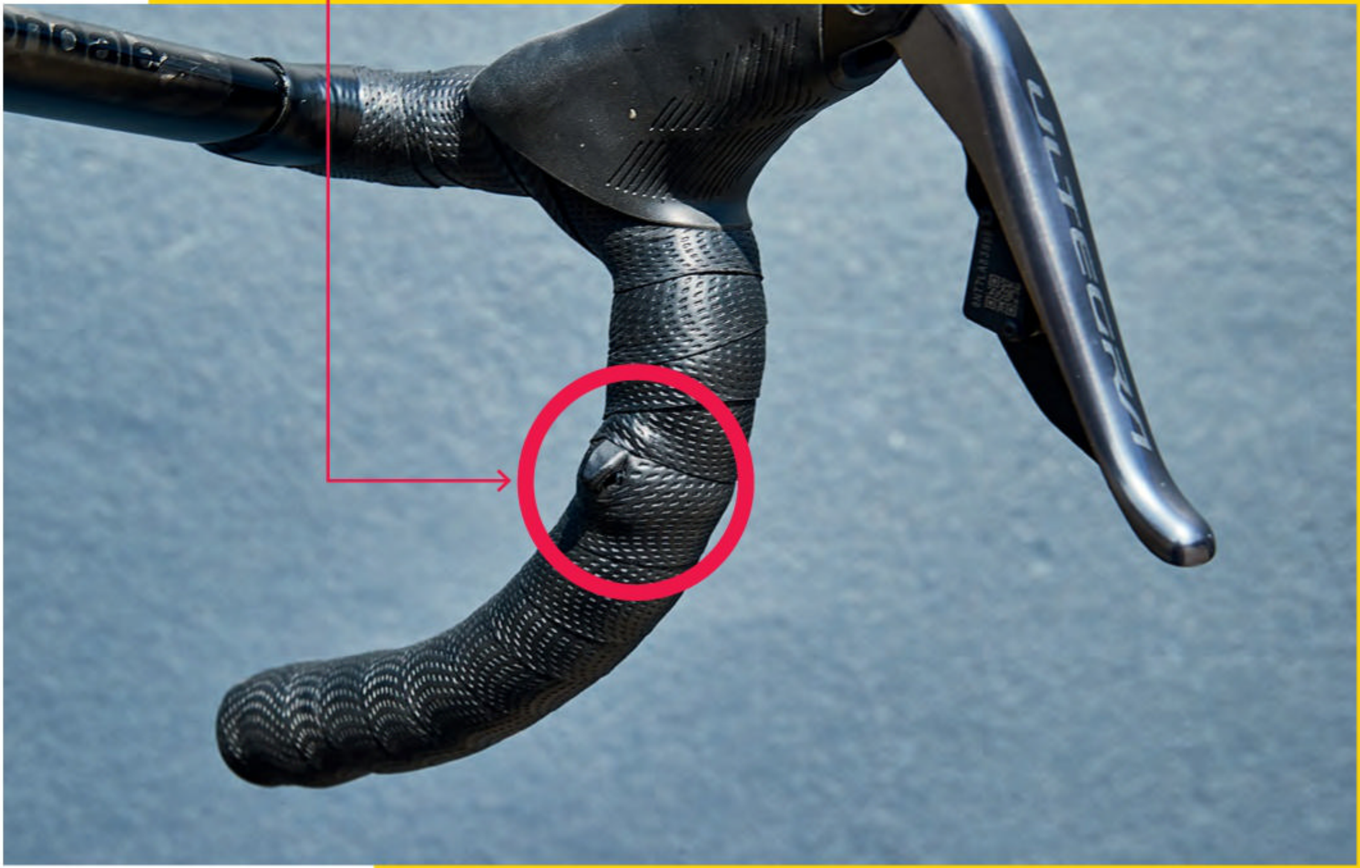
Newer riders often find the front derailleur a source of consternation. Specifically, how do you know when it's time to shift the front? First, don't stress: You can use all (or almost all) gearing combinations on modern drivetrains. The best practice, however, is to use the big ring as much as possible and save the small ring for use with the largest three or four cogs only.

60

There are a few reasons it's best to limit front shifts and use the big ring as much as possible. Front shifts are slower, clunkier, and more prone to hiccups than rear shifts. This is because a small-to-big ring shift is a much larger jump in teeth than a rear derailleur shift. Plus, larger-diameter rings and cogs reduce chain friction, providing more efficiency.

61

If you don't want to deal with a front derailleur, look for a bike with a 1x drivetrain. A single chain ring set-up is simpler to understand and use, and with a modern wide-range drivetrain, you can have most of the gear range of a 2x system. The biggest difference is that a 1x system typically has larger



Matt Phillips (SRAM XX1)

ratio jumps per shift than a 2x. Almost all mountain bikes use 1x drivetrains, as do many gravel, cyclocross and time-trial bikes. Standard drop-bar (or flat bar) road bikes can also be built with a wide-range 1x system.

62

The beginning of the end for the front derailleur on mountain bikes started in 2012 when SRAM debuted its XX1 1x11 drivetrain. Today, most mountain bikes have no provision for mounting a front derailleur.

63

Sounds and vibrations can tell you a lot about the condition of your drivetrain. A properly adjusted and lubricated drivetrain should be smooth and quiet, and shift precisely. It needs attention if it's noisy and buzzy while riding and shifting.

64

If your chain sounds squeaky or grinds, you're not only wasting energy, you're also costing yourself money. A properly lubricated, clean, and quiet drivetrain lasts longer, which means you're replacing parts less frequently.

SUPER SECRET
CHAIN COATING
8 OZ
ULTRA FAST
WATER-PROOF
WAX + NANO-SCALE
TUNGSTEN DISULFIDE

65

Most cable-actuated front derailleurs have 'trim' positions. This feature slightly repositions the front derailleur and prevents the chain, in some gear combinations, from rasping against the front derailleur cage. These trim positions are achieved with a half press of the front shifter paddles.

66

There are two basic types of mechanical shifting: indexed and friction. Modern mechanical drivetrains use indexed shifting. Each 'click' pulls or releases the cable a specific amount. This corresponds to a set amount of derailleur motion that moves the chain to the next gear. With friction shifting, the rider must move the shifter the amount needed to select the gear. Friction shifting is simple and less finicky – indexed shifting relies on perfectly aligned parts and a host of precision mechanical components in good working order.

67

A chain and derailleur drivetrain has all its parts exposed. The chain and derailleur system is light, efficient and easy to work on. This is why it is the dominant form of multi-speed drivetrains.

68

There are also internally geared systems. They look like a single-speed from afar because the transmission parts are hidden from view. Internal gears can be in rear hubs (like the familiar three-speed) and even gearboxes packaged between the crank arms. These systems can shift while pedalling, coasting or while stationary.

69

Internally geared systems are often more durable (fewer bendy and dangly bits), are less susceptible to foul conditions (rain, mud, snow), and require less maintenance because the gears are sealed from the elements and sit in an oil bath. But they are much heavier, and often less efficient than derailleur systems. In the case of a gearbox, fitting one requires a non-standard frame design.

70

Internally geared hubs have evolved beyond the three speeds found on beach cruisers. There are seven-, eight-, 11-, and even 14-speed internally geared hubs.

71

A spin on the internally geared hub is a CVT (continuously variable transmission) hub. These do not have a defined number of speeds or ratio steps. Instead, they have – between their highest and lowest ratio – infinitely variable ratios with no steps.

72

A recent twist on the internally geared drivetrain is Classified's Powershift hub. Inside the hub is a two-speed, wirelessly shifted system. Combined with a traditional rear derailleur and multi-speed cassette, this drivetrain provides the additional range of a two-ring drivetrain. But it replaces the front derailleur in favor of the reliable shifting of an internally geared hub.

73

A bicycle gearbox transmission is functionally similar to a car with a gear lever. Your legs spin the input side of the system (cranks), which turns a series of gears inside the transmission, which then spins the output side of the system (chain ring). The ratio of the selected gear controls how much faster or slower the chain ring spins than the cranks.

74

Germany's Pinion is the dominant maker of gearboxes for bicycles. It offers six-, nine-, 12- and 18-speed gearboxes, in cable-actuated and electronically shifted versions. Its newest product is a single unit combining an e-bike motor with a gearbox.

75

Before 1989, most shifters were simple levers mounted to the down tube or stem (road bikes) or on top of the handlebar (mountain bikes) – until Shimano Total Integration (STI) changed shifting forever. STI debuted two-paddle, under-bar shifters for mountain bikes (1989), and integrated brake lever/shifters (1990, sometimes called 'brifters') for road bikes. Both featured ratcheting paddles that returned to the same position after every shift. This allowed the rider to shift and brake from the same position (and simultaneously, if desired) without moving their hands. Additionally, drop-bar riders gained the ability to shift from both the hoods and drops. Campagnolo responded in 1992 with Ergopower, its integrated shift/brake lever.

76

One potential advantage of a gearbox or internally geared hub is that it can be paired to a belt drive instead of a chain drive. A belt is quieter and lower-maintenance than a chain. And because a belt does not need lubrication, it's a cleaner system.

77

In early 1940, Campagnolo debuted its first multi-speed drivetrain. The Cambio Corsa drivetrain consisted of a frame with toothed and extended horizontal dropouts and two levers mounted high on the right chainstay. One lever was the rear wheel's quick release, the other attached to a metal loop that moved the chain between the four available cogs. To shift while riding, the rider would reach back and flip open the quick release (yes, really) then use the other lever to push the chain to the next cog while pedalling backwards. Because it lacked any sort of system to take up or spool out chain length, the wheel would – with the rider on the bike – move forwards (bigger cogs) or backwards (smaller cogs) in the dropouts to adjust chain tension.

CLASSIFIED
II POWERSHIFT

Maegan Gindi (belt drive); Matt Phillips (Powershift)

72

SPECIALIZED
AllezLA

81

78

Most modern bikes mount the rear derailleur on a replaceable hanger. These hangers are designed to bend or break in an impact, sacrificing a less expensive part to save the costly mechanical component. Some of these hangers are soft and bend quite easily, causing derailleur misalignment that degrades shifting. For this reason, you want to avoid leaning the bike against its rear derailleur or laying it on the ground derailleur-side down.

79

To avoid bending the bike's derailleur hanger, be careful when packing a bike into a car or travel case. This is one of the most common ways hangers become bent.

80

A slightly bent derailleur may be straightened with a special tool. A hanger alignment tool (or hanger alignment gauge) is part ruler and part crowbar.

81

Replaceable derailleur hangers proliferated for decades, with every brand creating unique designs (sometimes for individual bike models). Since there are so many different hangers, it is often tough to find the right one at short notice – like during an event. That changed in 2019 when SRAM introduced the UDH (Universal Derailleur Hanger). All UDH bikes use the same hanger design, which makes them easier for shops to keep in stock. And it means riders can share a spare hanger in a pinch, no matter what bike they own.

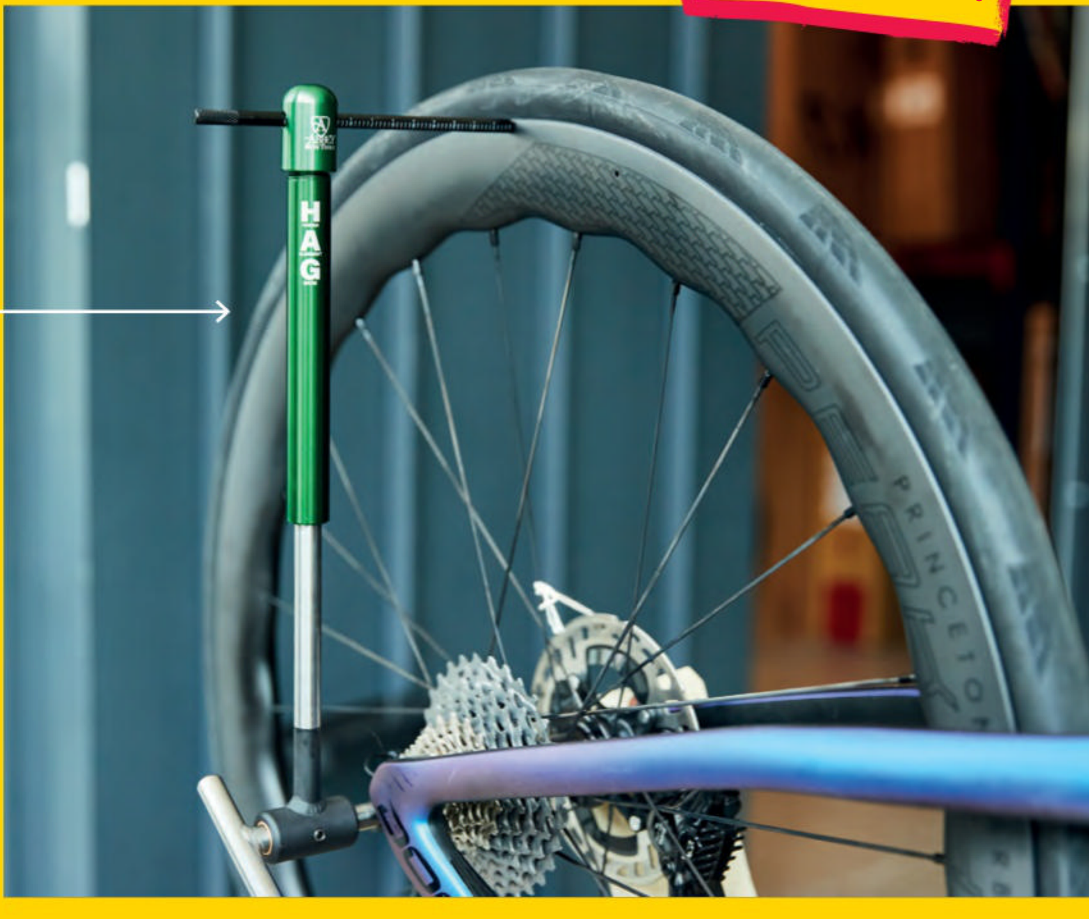
82

UDH's standardisation and cross-compatibility are awesome. However, the design was actually an effort to pre-seed the market with bikes designed to accept the hangerless, direct-mount rear derailleurs that SRAM debuted in 2023. The Full Mount design is very strong and stiff – it almost guarantees the derailleur is perfectly aligned underneath the cogs. So far, SRAM only makes Full Mount derailleurs for 1x mountain bike and gravel drivetrains.

83

Does all this talk about shifting make your head spin? Ride a single-speed. Single-speed bikes are light, simple, quiet, easy to maintain – and inexpensive.

84 / NOBODY CARES THAT YOU RIDE A SINGLE-SPEED!



85

There are two basic types of lubricant: liquid and wax. Liquid lube is usually easier and faster to apply, and can be long-lasting. But it can be messy and attract dirt. Wax lubricants are cleaner, and a properly prepared waxed chain is usually faster than a chain with liquid lubricant. But waxing a chain can be a more time-intensive process, and many waxes don't hold up as well as a liquid in foul conditions.

86

Lubing a chain isn't about smearing oil or wax on the exposed part of the chain. It's about getting lubricant inside the rollers and between the inner and outer plate interface.

87

With time, a chain wears and needs replacement. Recommendations vary by manufacturer, and even by chain type. The accepted rule of thumb is to replace it when a chain is 0.5 to 0.75 percent longer than new.

88

Although chain wear is called 'stretch', the metal isn't really stretching. Instead, it's the pins and rollers that are wearing.

89

Keep on top of chain wear and follow replacement recommendations, because the chain is the least expensive part of your drivetrain. Riding too long with a worn chain will accelerate wear on more expensive parts like cassettes and chain rings. Worn chain rings and cassettes don't shift well, might skip, and can cause situations like chain suck (when the chain gets jammed between the crank and the frame), which can destroy a frame.

90

Do not use time or mileage to guide chain replacement. Different environments, lubing practices, and even your most-used gearing combinations all influence chain-wear rates.

91

Chain-wear checkers are simple go/no-go tools with two fingers that measure the distance between a handful of links. One finger is inserted between a link's inner plates. If the second finger drops between the inner link plates, the chain needs replacement. If the finger hits a roller and can't drop, the chain is still good.

92

A simple way to check if a chain needs replacement is to grab a link at the three o'clock position on the chainring and lift it away from the ring. If you can lift the chain off the ring 'a lot', it's probably time to replace the chain. But it's best to confirm with a chain-wear checker tool.

93

Another quick way to check chain wear is with a straight-edge ruler. With a metric ruler, count 10 pins: the pin centre distance from the first to the 10th pin will be 25.4 millimetres when new. If the length is 25.6mm or more, the chain is worn and needs replacement. Because of the small measurements involved, this method is not super-precise, and it's best to confirm wear with a chain-wear checker tool.

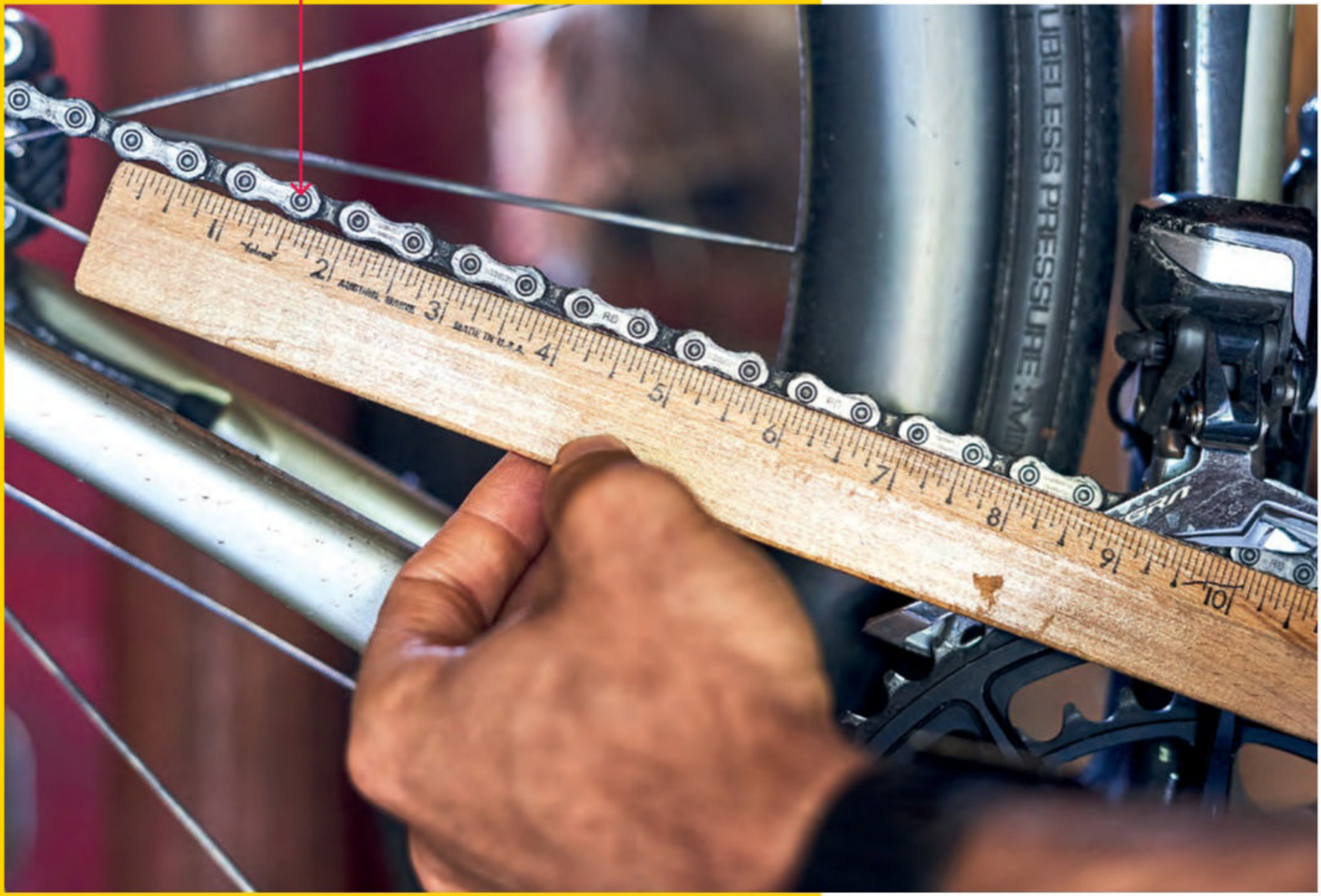
94

The traditional way of evaluating chain wear is by measuring linear distance. Abbey Bike Tools recently introduced a device that measures lateral wear in addition to linear wear. The company states that 1x drivetrains subject the chain to more extreme angles that accelerate lateral wear. Abbey claims that too much lateral wear affects the shifting performance of a 1x drivetrain, even if the chain still passes linear wear checks.

95

If you're switching to a new chain lube, thoroughly degrease and rinse your chain before applying the new lubricant. Many effective chain-cleaning fluids are available, but Cleen Green is easy to find, comparatively inexpensive, and an effective degreaser.

NO BLEACH OR AMMONIA
wynn's
BIODEGRADABLE
CLEEN GREEN
CONCENTRATE
CLEANS & REMOVES
HOUSEHOLD, AUTOMOTIVE & GENERAL GREASE & GRIME
LIMPA E REMOVE GORDURA E SUJIDADE
NETTOIE ET ÉLIMINE LA SALETÉ ET LA GRAISSE


TUBELESS PRESSURE: MI
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96

Like chain lubing, a proper chain clean isn't about the outside of the chain, but cleaning and flushing inside the rollers. For that reason, it's best to soak a chain in degreaser for a bit. Moving the chain while it soaks also helps.

97

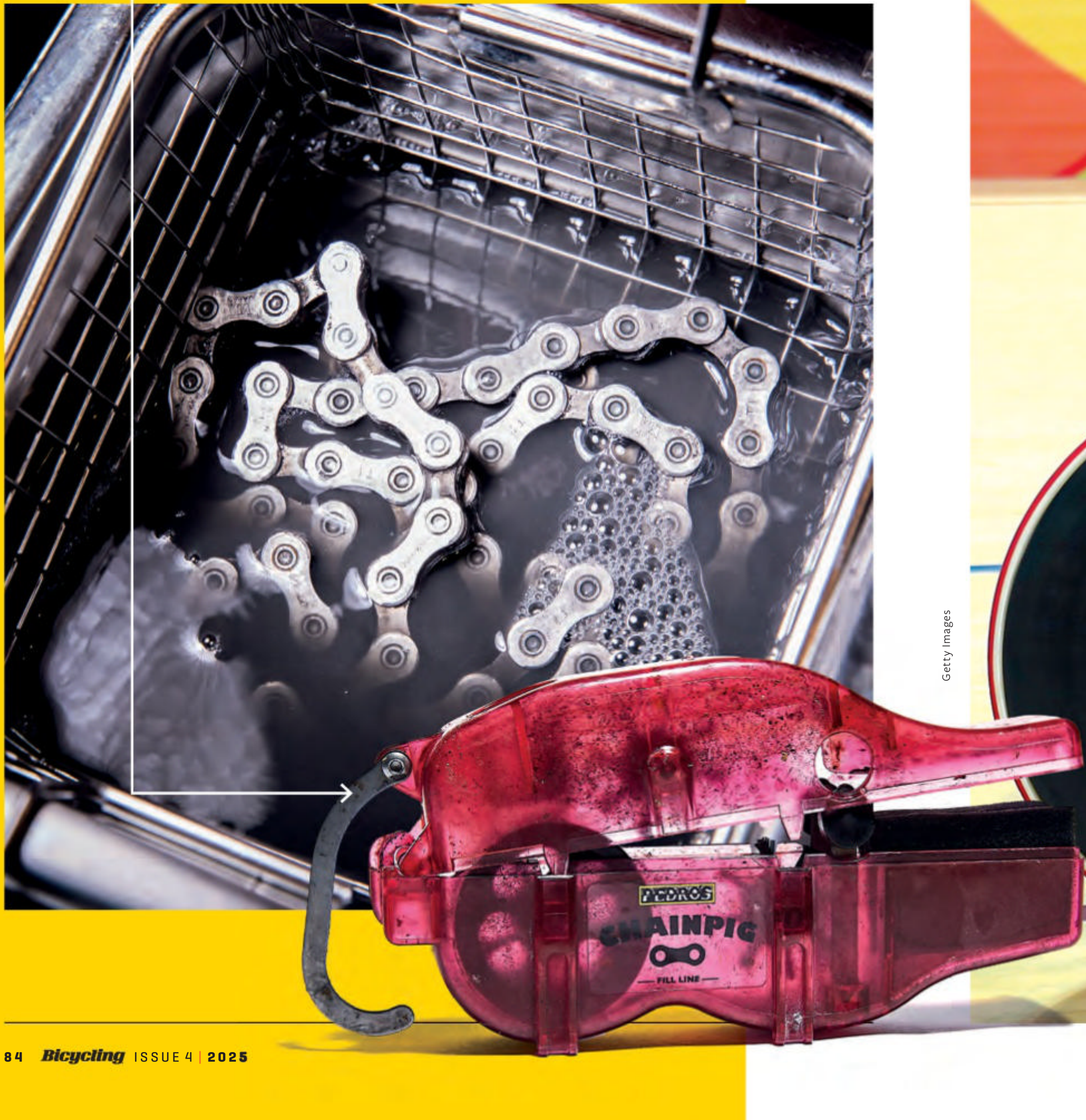
Chain-scrubber tools can be an effective way to clean your chain without removing it from the bike. However, remember that just because the outside of the chain looks shiny and clean, it doesn't always mean the rollers are fully clean. Take your time, and ensure the degreaser soaks fully into the chain's nooks and crannies.

98

BCD (Bolt Circle Diameter) is the mounting pattern to attach chain rings to a crank's spider. The spider is the multi-armed disc that projects from the centre of the right-side crankarm. Cranks that eschew spiders and feature chain rings that bolt directly to the drive-side crankarm are called direct-mount chain rings.

99

Like many elements of a bicycle's drivetrain, BCDs and spiders were once fairly standardised and made for easily interchangeable chainrings. Today, spiders and BCDs are often



Getty Images

proprietary, which means that before you shop for new chain rings, you must know your crank's brand and model (Shimano, SRAM, and Campagnolo all have multiple BCD and spider formats).

100

Bicycles have a drive side and a non-drive side. The drive side – so named because it's the side of the frame the drivetrain is mounted to – is usually the right. However, some bikes use LSD (left-side drive). Some freestyle BMX riders grind on the right side and prefer an LSD. A few speciality track bikes use LSD because track racing is done counterclockwise, and having the drivetrain on the inside of the turns is more aerodynamically advantageous.

101

The French word 'souplesse' is often used to convey the appearance of grace on the bike, and refers to a supple and effortless pedal stroke. As you ride, imagine your legs and feet moving quickly but smoothly to turn the cranks as you keep your upper body relaxed and quiet. Shift as needed to maintain a cadence that allows you to achieve smoothness. When you achieve this, you have mastered shifting! **B**

SPIN IT TO WIN IT

Whether you're new to indoor training or looking to upgrade your existing pain cave, go from couch to KOM this winter with the best new gear, accessories and workouts from the pros – all guaranteed to boost your power.

BY **JON MINSTER** & **DAN CHABANOV**

Image: Trevor Raab

ANOTHER THING YOU CAN DO ON AN INDOOR TRAINER IS AN FTP TEST. MOST APPS, INCLUDING ZWIFT AND TRAINERROAD, CAN GUIDE YOU THROUGH THE PROCESS. KNOWING YOUR FTP CAN HELP YOU TRAIN BETTER, STRUCTURE YOUR WORKOUTS AND TRACK YOUR PROGRESS.

MOST TRAINER BRANDS OFFER VARIOUS DESIGNER ACCESSORIES TO KEEP YOU IN A PARTICULAR 'ECOSYSTEM'. BUT SOMETIMES, A PLAIN OLD BOX FAN AND A LAPTOP ON A TABLE WORK JUST AS WELL.

IT'S A FACT.

Indoor workouts can massively improve your fitness and technique.

Indoor riding also offers some benefits that outdoor riding doesn't, thanks to the controlled environment. You don't have to tussle with cars, for example, or wear multiple layers to survive the pre-dawn chill. A trainer is a great tool to get you through winter, and it allows you to squeeze in a ride when life might not allow you enough time to get outside.

Of course, indoor riding can't match actual riding when it comes to having fun, but that doesn't mean indoor needs to be boring. With the right set-up, a good playlist and a plan that keeps your mind engaged, the time will fly by as you crank out the watts.

Where do I start? You need a trainer or a stationary bike – something to ride on inside. This can be anything from a basic set of rollers to an advanced smart bike that connects to an online training platform. The most popular way to train indoors is to use a 'smart trainer', which syncs your power data wirelessly with a training app.

Most smart trainers also interact with virtual riding platforms like Zwift, MyWhoosh and others, by automatically adjusting resistance to simulate changes in terrain. Obviously, these 'smart' features add to the cost of the trainer, but prices are falling – you can pick up an entry-level direct-drive smart trainer like the Magene T200 for about R11 000.

Old-school, wheel-on, friction-based trainers can transmit *some* smart data, and they can simulate hills up to about 6%. They're also substantially cheaper: the Garmin Tacx Flow Smart and Wahoo Kickr Snap 2 both retail for about R6 000.

Image: Supplied

> INDOOR RIDING NEEDN'T BE BORING. WITH THE RIGHT SET-UP, A GOOD PLAYLIST AND A PLAN THAT KEEPS YOUR MIND ENGAGED, THE TIME WILL FLY BY AS YOU CRANK OUT THE WATTS.

Which bike can I use? If you have a bike manufactured in the last 20-odd years, you should be able to use it with a modern smart trainer. Even though axle attachment standards and widths change constantly, most trainers ship with the necessary adaptors.

When buying a direct-drive trainer, make sure it either comes with the same-speed cassette as the one on your bike, or that you have an extra cassette to install on the trainer.

Don't want to think about that? Certain new trainers like the Wahoo Kickr Zwift One use a single gear to eliminate that issue.

Will buying a trainer upset my neighbours? There are no guarantees in life, but most of today's direct-drive trainers are very quiet. Your neighbours – or your spouse or other housemates – are more likely to hear the vibrations of the trainer through the walls and ceiling, rather than the actual noise made by the trainer.

A thick foam mat (in combination with a carpet or rug) can go a long way towards eliminating the noise issue. Most of the noise comes from your bike's drivetrain, so keep that chain lubricated. If you use a fan to keep cool, it will also make a noise.

Put simply, riding inside is not a quiet pursuit; so try and put your trainer somewhere where it won't bother others.

What about accessories? For a simple set-up, you need a table for your iPad or laptop, a mat to help reduce noise and protect your floor (any yoga-like mat will work), and a fan to keep cool. None of these are compulsory, but they do improve the experience.

I'm worried about stability... You needn't be. Rollers require balance, concentration and skill; but trainer crashes are almost unheard of, even when you're going cross-eyed trying to beat your PB.

Typically, the broader the trainer's base, the more stable it will be. Many have a levelling feature for uneven surfaces, and the newer ones even allow for some movement, to simulate the feeling of being on the road.

Is a direct-drive trainer worth it? If you ride indoors more than a few times a year, or if you aspire to make it a regular part of your training routine, then yes – a direct-drive trainer is worth investing in. Direct-drive trainers offer a vastly superior feel to friction-based trainers.

What's the best trainer for multiple different bikes and riders? Everybody's bike is different, which makes having one trainer difficult if you live in a house where you, your wife and maybe your kids all want to use it. The best option in this scenario is a dedicated indoor bike, like the Technogym Ride. Changing seat height and bar reach is a breeze, and it means you can store your dirty bikes in the garage and use them for outdoor riding only.

What kind of extra maintenance and cleaning should I do to keep sweat from messing up the shifters, headset bearings, etc? Indoor bikes should get as much regular maintenance as outdoor bikes. Sweat is incredibly corrosive – always wipe away visible sweat from your bike after every ride. Take it off the trainer and wash it at least once a month. Keep the chain lubed and clean. And definitely check under your bar tape at least every three months, to make sure you aren't corroding through your handlebars.

Will the warranty on my carbon bike be voided if I use it on a trainer? There's no clear-cut answer to this, because warranty policies vary from brand to brand. According to the community website *Zwift Insider*, certain brands explicitly state in their policy that trainer use will void the warranty; other brands are unclear about it.

It's highly unlikely that you'll damage your bike, but if you're worried about hurting your new baby and not being able to claim for it, your best bet is to check with your bike's manufacturer and get a definitive answer.

THE BEST NEW TRAINERS AND ACCESSORIES

The latest crop of smart trainers are so clever and quiet, they'll make you fall in love with indoor training in no time.

KICKR
wahoo

BEST OVERALL

WAHOO KICKR V6

R19 999 / WAHOOFITNESS.CO.ZA

PROS • Wi-Fi connectivity • Easy ERG mode • Folding and adjustable legs **CONS** • Only includes 11-speed cassette

THE ORIGINAL WAHOO KICKR CHANGED indoor training for many riders. Five iterations later, the newest one is more of an update than a wholesale redesign, but those small changes are enough to put Wahoo ahead of the competition again, especially in terms of connectivity. Yup, the latest Kickr – and Wahoo's second-gen Kickr Bike – are the only trainers available with internal Wi-Fi connectivity.

With the addition of Wi-Fi, Wahoo aims to solve the most frustrating aspect of smart trainers: connection dropouts. ANT+ and Bluetooth are not going anywhere for power meters and cycling computers – both are good for portable devices powered by batteries. Wi-Fi needs more power, but it can result in a 65% improvement in data transfer speed. Simply put: your watts make it to your avatar that much quicker.

Unless you spend a lot of time racing on Zwift, this might seem trivial, but improving your avatar's reaction time can have a big benefit. It can let riders drop into a tuck faster on descents, and makes launching sprints more precise.

Even if you're not a dedicated Zwift racer, Wi-Fi connectivity offers several other benefits. It ensures your trainer stays updated in the background with the latest firmware, for example, without having to use the app. You *do* have to use the app to set up the Wi-Fi the first time, but then you basically never need to open it again.

Then there's the new 'ERG Easy Ramp' feature, which automatically adjusts the resistance so you can hold a specified wattage. In other words, you can focus on your effort while the trainer does the rest.

The ERG mode on previous Kickr trainers did weird things if something interrupted you. As your cadence slowed or stopped, the trainer still applied the same resistance, which made it harder to get going again from a stop. ERG Easy Ramp provides a gradual 10-second ramp back up to the target wattage, giving you time to settle back into your preferred cadence. (For owners of Kickr versions 3 to 5 and Kickr Bike V1, Wahoo will roll out this feature with future firmware updates.)

The new Kickr looks virtually identical to the previous version. And because both versions use the same flywheel, the ride feel is also much the same. As for noise, the status quo remains; like most high-end, direct-drive trainers that have come out over the last few years, the most significant source of noise when riding is actually your drivetrain.

Power accuracy seems very good, with shorter efforts showing the most discrepancy, but anything longer than one minute is well within the claimed 1% accuracy. (It's hard to test these things conclusively, as all we're checking is how close the Kickr matches the power meter, but still: it's reassuring to see things line up so closely.)

Setting up the Kickr is straightforward. Set the wheel size of your bike, and level it using the adjustable feet. The only potential hang-up is the supplied 11-speed cassette. If your bike has more (or fewer) gears, you'll need to install the appropriate cassette – and buy it, if you don't already own one. If the cassette you need doesn't use a Shimano freehub interface, you'll also need to source the appropriate SRAM or Campagnolo freehub body from Wahoo.

There are cheaper trainers, but despite the price and the lack of cassette choice, the Kickr V6 is a solid update. Being the first to offer Wi-Fi connectivity will probably give Wahoo an edge over other high-end trainers, at least for a little while.

Images: Supplied

THE AXIS FEET ON THE V6 APPARENTLY OFFER 5% MORE MOTION THAN PREVIOUS KICKRS, AND THEY'RE QUIETER ON THE FLOOR.

BEST FOR SIMULATED RIDE FEEL

GARMIN TACX NEO 3M

R43 999 / GARMIN.COM

PROS • Quiet operation • Four-way motion and road surface simulation • Doesn't need a power cable **CONS** • Lacks the fast data transfer of the Wahoo Kickr V6

▶ **IN TERMS OF KEY SPECS, THE NEO 3M** is similar to the Wahoo Kickr V6: power measurement maxes out at 2 200W with 1% accuracy, and maximum simulated gradient is up to 25%. But the Neo 3M has two features found nowhere else.

Firstly, it generates its own electricity, which means you can use it without external power (although to use *all* the features, you'll need to plug it in). Second, it has a vibration function. Like an old-school Nintendo Rumble Pack, when you're riding on Zwift, the whole trainer shudders to simulate a wide range of road surfaces, from gravel to cobblestones to concrete slab roads. Combine that with the built-in motion plates, and you have a trainer that provides impressively realistic ride feel.

> **THE WHOLE TRAINER SHUDDERS TO SIMULATE A WIDE RANGE OF ROAD SURFACES, FROM GRAVEL TO COBBLESTONES TO CONCRETE SLAB ROADS.**

Unlike other direct-drive trainers that use belts or rollers, or a solid flywheel, the NEO 3M uses electromagnetic resistance to simulate inertia. It's quieter and smoother than other designs, and more accurate, too. The trainer comes with pedal stroke analysis and a through-axle adapter that accommodates 142 x 12mm and 148 x 12mm axles, and it's compatible with Shimano and SRAM 8- to 12-speed drivetrains. An 11-speed 11-28t cassette comes pre-installed.

The downside of the NEO 3M is that it's missing a few key features that we'd like to see in a trainer at this price point. Mainly, it lacks built-in Wi-Fi. Yes, you can buy a Wi-Fi accessory separately from Tacx (R3 199), but that feels clunky compared to the built-in connection of Wahoo's Kickr V6. Additionally, the NEO 3M lacks the high-speed data transfer mode of the V6.

Are these things strictly necessary? No, but the Neo 3M is a premium trainer that's competing directly with the Kickr V6, even though the latter is about half the price of the Tacx unit.

We're sure Tacx will address connectivity in future updates to their top-tier trainer; and if you're happy to overlook this issue, then it's a brilliant piece of tech that makes riding indoors as fun as it can be.

GARMIN
Tacx
TACX NEO 3M
Tacx

THE TACX NEO 3M IS QUIET, SLEEKLY DESIGNED AND FULL OF FUN FEATURES THAT MAKE INDOOR RIDING AS REALISTIC AS POSSIBLE.

THE TECHNOGYM RIDE IS AN ALL-IN-ONE INDOOR SOLUTION THAT WORKS BRILLIANTLY FOR MULTIPLE RIDERS.

BEST INDOOR BIKE

TECHNOGYM RIDE

ABOUT R130 000 / TECHNOGYM.COM

PROS • Great solution for multiple riders • Integrated touchscreen **CONS** • Price

THE TECHNOGYM RIDE IS A PREMIUM indoor smart bike designed with serious cyclists in mind. It's not your average 'gym bike', by any stretch of the imagination.

The standout feature is the 22-inch integrated touchscreen, which supports native apps such as Zwift, Rouvy, Strava and Netflix, making it one of the few bikes that doesn't require a separate device for immersive training or entertainment. It tilts, too, so you can adjust it for glare.

The frame geometry is based on a real road bike. Gone are the days of sitting upright and spinning your legs like a besuited gentleman in Victorian England. The saddle and handlebar have micro-adjustable positions, offering perfect fit for riders of all shapes and sizes. And this is one of the major benefits of a training bike over another indoor trainer – it's easy to set up for multiple people to use, without having to remove wheels and worry about cassette standards, etc. The onboard resistance system is smooth and quiet, delivering up to 20% incline simulation with responsive changes.

However, there are certain areas that could be improved. The main thing is the price, which is high when you compare similarly-specced smart bikes like the Wahoo KICKR Bike (from R65k) or the Tacx NEO Bike (R88k). Also, while it supports third-party apps, updates and compatibility are occasionally laggy, compared to the experience of using that app on a phone or laptop.

Still, these are very small niggles. If you can afford it, the Technogym Ride is a beautifully built, immersive smart bike that will make your pain cave look like a spread from an architecture magazine.

BEST-VALUE SMART TRAINER

MAGENE T200

R10 999 / BICYCLEPOWER.CO.ZA

PROS • Excellent value for money **CONS** • Not as accurate as more expensive trainers

IN CASE YOU HAVEN'T WORKED IT OUT YET, riding and training indoors is an expensive pursuit…

If you'd prefer to spend money on your actual bike and save a bit on your indoor set-up, the Magene T200 is well worth considering. It's a direct-drive smart trainer that offers a solid balance of performance, quiet operation and affordability.

Power accuracy (about 2.5%), max power (1 800W) and gradient simulation (15%) might not be equivalent to the Wahoo Kickr V6 or the Tacx NEO 3M, but most users won't need more than what the T200 offers. It's compatible with a wide range of bikes and cassettes, including Shimano and SRAM 8- to 12-speed and SRAM XDR (with an adaptor), and it supports all the popular training apps via ANT+ and Bluetooth.

It lacks some of the advanced features of higher-end trainers (like downhill simulation) and the companion app used for firmware updates and calibration could be more intuitive and user-friendly. But overall, it's very hard to beat for the price.

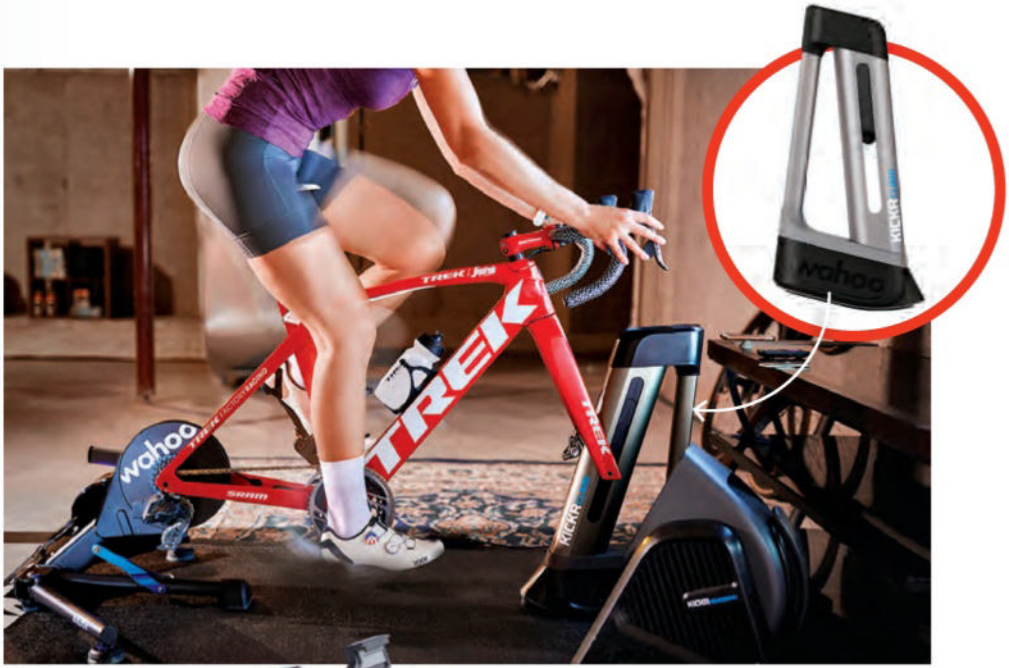
An added bonus is the compact design. It weighs just under 14kg and has a foldable frame, which makes it easy to store and transport.

T200
TRAINING WITH T200

IF INDOOR RIDING IS A WINTER SIDE HUSTLE, AND YOU HAVE LIMITED SPACE, THE MAGENE T200 MIGHT BE ALL YOU NEED.

KICK-ASS ACCESSORIES

YOU'VE GOT THE TRAINER – NOW WHAT? BUILD UP YOUR DREAM PAIN CAVE WITH THESE ADD-ONS.



WAHOO KICKR CLIMB

R13 999 / **WAHOOFITNESS.CO.ZA**

Genuine improvement, or gimmick? The jury's out on the Kickr Climb, which physically raises and lowers your bike's front end to simulate the real-world feeling of climbing and descending.

It's particularly cool when you're riding in a virtual world, like on Zwift; but the high price is a bit of a turn-off. It's also only available for Wahoo trainers from 2017 onwards.

wahoo
KICKR

WAHOO KICKR HEADWIND

R7 999 / **WAHOOFITNESS.CO.ZA**

Like the Kickr Climb, the Headwind is designed to bring the real world into your garage. It intelligently adjusts airflow based on your speed or heart rate; and it's powerful, too, delivering airflow up to 48km/h. It cools you down, it has a sleek design, and it offers a more immersive ride; but again, it only works in the Wahoo ecosystem, and you could buy quite a few normal fans for the price.

Images: Supplied

TACX TABLET BRACKET

R2 199 / **GARMIN.COM**

If you have a TV or a desk set-up, then you don't need this. But if you have limited space for your indoor trainer and you're looking for a sleek solution to hold a tablet in place for Zwift, or to display your workout data, then this bracket from Tacx is a winner.

It locks onto handlebars of varying diameters and it's so sturdy you could even ride with it on gravel, as Ray Maker from *DC Rainmaker* did. (Google it.) That's not recommended; but for indoor use, you know your tablet isn't going anywhere.

DECATHLON FLOOR MAT

FROM R599 / **DECATHLON.CO.ZA**

You could buy a mat allegedly designed for indoor riding for double or triple the price of this one; or you could save the money and get this durable PVC foam mat from Decathlon, which will do the same job. It's available in three sizes – medium or large should be fine for your indoor set-up, depending on how much space you have.

CIOVITA SWEAT GUARD

R349 / **CIOVITA.CO.ZA**

Protect your bike from your corrosive juices... The guard features a twin-panel design, with an absorbent microfibre fabric on top and a durable PVC bottom layer. It's easy to fit to any bike, and the tapered design ensures that the guard stays clear of your legs while you're pedalling.

3 INDOOR WORKOUTS FROM THE PROS

Pro riders share their favourite trainer workouts, and how they keep indoor riding fun.

BY **MOLLY HURFORD**

MAKE IT FUN

Moolman-Pasio is a big fan of sharing the pain. "There's nothing quite like suffering together and pushing each other," she says. "I'd recommend joining a group workout, and I'd especially recommend signing up to the Rocacorba Collective training tier – our in-house coach will guide you on Discord. Having a voice in the room to motivate you makes things way more enjoyable, and really helps to get the most out of your performance."

01. Ashleigh Moolman-Pasio's Power Ride

When the South African legend isn't racing in the pro peloton or helping manage Rocacorba Cycling – her cycle tourism business near Girona, Spain, which she runs with her husband Carl – she's crushing it on Zwift. Her Rocacorba Collective programme, a membership-based indoor cycling community, helps motivate women around the world.

This is her favourite workout to build power: four-minute efforts up Alp du Zwift. "The session involves multiple efforts in Zone 5 at a low rpm, with a five-minute recovery between efforts," she says. "It's not much fun, but the reason it's my favourite is because it builds absolute power, and I just know it makes me stronger."

Don't have Zwift? You can emulate this effort on any trainer.

Total time: 74-84 minutes

Warm up: 10-15 minutes easy spin

Main set (6 rounds)

- **4 min at VO2 max** (Zone 5) at low cadence (50-60 rpm)
- **5 min recovery** (Zone 2) at comfortable cadence (70-90 rpm)

Cool down: 10-15 minutes easy spin

Images: Supplied

02. Ashton Lambie's VO2 Max Workout

The US track star and the first person to go sub-four minutes on a 4 000m pursuit does most of his power work on the trainer. "This is one of my favourite workouts," he says. "The 30-second efforts in the main set shouldn't be absolutely on the limit; but they should be well into Zone 5, your VO2 zone.

"They can also be done out of the saddle. With the decreasing 'rest' intervals, you'll really have to focus on efficiency and recovering between the sprints! This is a great workout to simulate race-style efforts."

Total time: 86 minutes

Warm up: 5-minute easy spin

Mini sets, building up intensity

- **3 min – Zone 1** (recovery)
- **2 min – Zone 2** (endurance)
- **2 min – Zone 3** (tempo)
- **2 min – Zone 4** (threshold)
- **Recovery** – 2 min easy spin
- **2 min – Zone 5** (VO2)
- **Recovery** – 3 min easy spin

Main set (3 rounds)

- **5 min – Zone 3** (tempo)
- **30 seconds – Sprint** (all-out)
- **4 min – Zone 3** (tempo)
- **30 seconds – Sprint** (all-out)
- **3 min – Zone 3** (tempo)
- **30 seconds – Sprint** (all-out)
- **2 min – Zone 3** (tempo)
- **30 seconds – Sprint** (all-out)
- **Between sets:** 4 min easy spinning

Cool down: 5 min easy spin

MAKE IT FUN

Known for his penchant for country music – and his moustache – Lambie has recently broadened his horizons. "I've been into Japanese funk lately, specifically the artist Masayoshi Takanaka. His jams make these intervals go by pretty quickly!"

03. Cole Paton's Tempo Workout

Even mountain bikers spend time on the trainer. The former US marathon champ turned gravel racer is a fan of workouts that are efficient and effective, with plenty of change-ups to prevent monotony. "This is a short-and-sweet strength-effort pyramid," he says. "I like it because there isn't a whole lot of time to get bored."

Note that the strength comes from changing the cadence (rpm) in each tempo block, rather than changing the effort level itself.

MAKE IT FUN

"Be as prepared as possible," Paton says. "I like to have three water bottles ready, all my ride food, a big fan, and a mirror. Riding inside in front of a mirror is a great opportunity to make sure your body position is aero, and you're maintaining good form while pushing hard."

Total time: 59 minutes

Warm up: 10 min easy spin

Tempo set 1

- **3 min tempo** (Zone 3), 70 rpm
- **2 min tempo** (Zone 3), 60 rpm
- **1 min tempo** (Zone 3), 50 rpm
- **30 sec tempo** (Zone 3), 40 rpm

1:30 min easy spin

Tempo set 2

- **30 sec tempo** (Zone 3), 40 rpm
- **1 min tempo** (Zone 3), 50 rpm
- **2 min tempo** (Zone 3), 60 rpm
- **3 min tempo** (Zone 3), 70 rpm

10 min endurance (Zone 2)

Tempo set 3

- **3 min tempo** (Zone 3), 70 rpm
- **2 min tempo** (Zone 3), 60 rpm
- **1 min tempo** (Zone 3), 50 rpm
- **30 sec tempo** (Zone 3), 40 rpm

1:30 min easy spin

Tempo set 4

- **30 sec tempo** (Zone 3), 40 rpm
- **1 min tempo** (Zone 3), 50 rpm
- **2 min tempo** (Zone 3), 60 rpm
- **3 min tempo** (Zone 3), 70 rpm

Cool down: 10 min easy spin

300w
THE JOY OF RIDING (INDOORS)
HALF MAN HALF TURBO
NPCC

OPINION: LET'S ACCEPT THAT INDOOR RIDING SUCKS

It's taken me too much time and money to understand that no accessory or subscription is going to change that!

BY **JOHN HAMILTON**
ILLUSTRATION **DAVID MCMILLAN**

I've always been a bit jealous of cyclists who get really into Zwift racing, or those who can endure a two-plus-hour ride indoors. That's never been me.

Five minutes after getting on the trainer, I'm already rethinking my plan to ride for 90 minutes and convincing myself that half of that is plenty. Another 10 minutes later, and I suddenly hate my perfectly dialled-in bike fit. A few minutes after that, I'm stressing about work. The whole time I'm wishing I was doing something else – *anything* else!

I'm definitely not the only cyclist who finds the trainer monotonous, which is why the bike industry has come up with a number of pricey accessories designed to make indoor riding feel more immersive. As an example, Wahoo's Headwind 'smart fan' attempts to replicate a headwind, and their Kickr 'grade simulator' will raise and lower your fork as you pedal through a digital world. Various 'motion simulation' platforms are available that claim to bring the freedom of riding outside to training indoors.

I know there are *Bicycling* editors who swear by some of these accessories [*Guilty as charged. – Ed.*] but for me, such products do next to nothing to trick my brain into believing I'm anywhere but my living room. I'm still stuck inside, and I still hate it.

On paper, riding on a trainer and riding on a flat road shouldn't be all that different. But bikes are designed to move, not to be locked into place on a stationary device.

And my brain is, too. I'll ride for hours by myself – through nasty weather, on boring roads – and not for a second wish I was doing anything else. I never think about checking the phone in my jersey pocket or worrying about what's waiting for me at work on Monday. As someone who struggles to clear my head, this is the closest I'll ever get to meditating.

What the trainer does for my mind is the polar opposite. Sure, a motion control platform might make the trainer a bit more palatable, but it's not going to get close to the feeling of cresting a climb out of the saddle. A smart fan might simulate the feeling of speed, but not the thrill of hitting 70km/h on a steep descent.

> BIKES ARE DESIGNED TO MOVE, NOT TO BE LOCKED INTO PLACE ON A STATIONARY DEVICE. MY BRAIN IS, TOO.

Indoor riding remains a necessary evil for maintaining some sort of fitness during a long, cold winter; but instead of building a perfect pain cave with all the fancy accessories, I've found that a super-simple (and cheap) set-up works just fine. I prop a box fan on a chair, pair my trainer to my head unit, put on a movie, and ride.

I don't have to wait for Zwift to update, or mess around with pairing four things to my laptop. I can do a structured workout using my Wahoo Elemnt, or I can just jump on and spin for 30 minutes to keep my legs moving.

Having such a simple set-up also makes me feel much less guilty if I cut my ride short. I don't enjoy it, and that's fine by me.

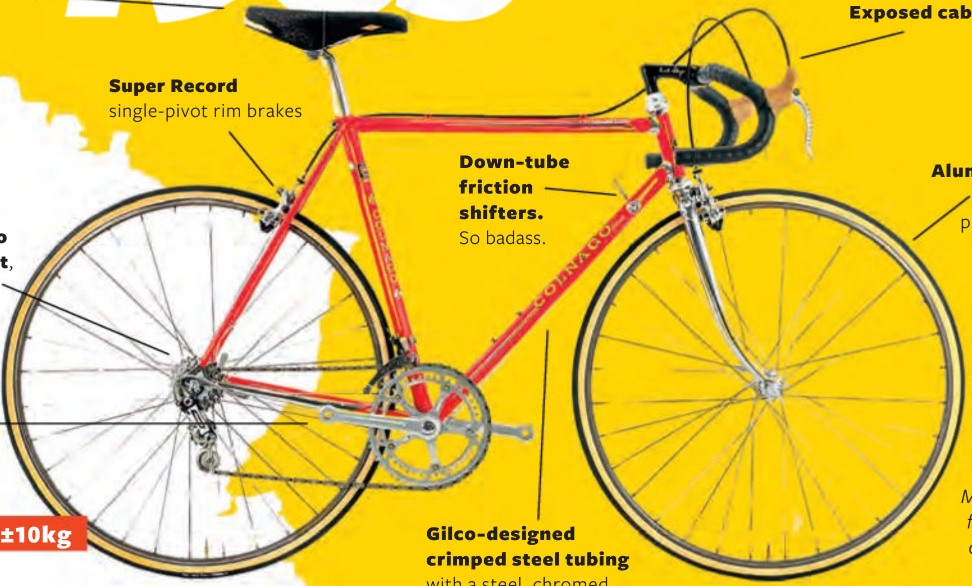
Hopefully, the weather will be better tomorrow! **B**

40 YEARS OF *FAST*

THE BIKES OF THE TOUR DE FRANCE HAVE CHANGED DRAMATICALLY OVER THE YEARS. HERE'S HOW A **1985 COLNAGO MASTER** COMPARES TO TADEJ POGAČAR'S **2025 COLNAGO V5RS.**

1985

As ridden by Irish legend Stephen Roche at the 1985 Tour, for team Carrera-Inoxpran. Roche would go on to win the Tour in 1987, but aboard a Battaglin...



Leather-covered Selle San Marco Rolls saddle. Comfy.

Exposed cables. Not aero.

Super Record single-pivot rim brakes

Down-tube friction shifters. So badass.

Aluminium alloy rims with tubular tyres, probably 23mm wide.

Six-speed Campagnolo Super Record groupset, with a 13–21T cassette. Ouch.

175mm forged aluminium cranks, 52/42T chain rings

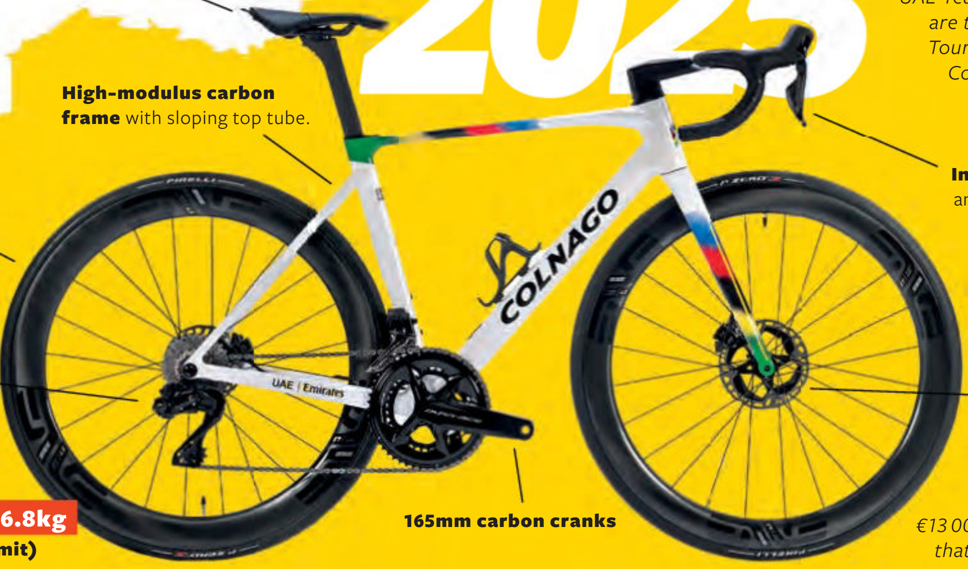
Weight ±10kg

Gilco-designed crimped steel tubing with a steel, chromed fork. Oh, baby.

Might pick one up for R20,000 on a classifieds site if you're lucky.

2025

In 2025, UAE Team Emirates (men) and UAE Team ADQ (women) are the only World Tour teams aboard Colnago bikes.



Prologo saddle with carbon rails. In 2025, Pog switched to a 3D-printed Fizik saddle.

High-modulus carbon frame with sloping top tube.

Integrated cockpit and internally-routed cables through the D-shaped carbon fork.

ENVE SES 4.5 carbon wheels, with 28mm Pirelli tubeless tyres.

12-speed Shimano Dura-Ace Di2, with 50/40 chain rings and an 11-34T cassette.

Hydraulic disc brakes

Weight ±6.8kg (UCI limit)

165mm carbon cranks

€13 000 at this spec – that's R270 000...

Words: Jon Minster, Images: Supplied

"HE DIDN'T EVEN KISS ME GOODNIGHT."

Bill's been working so hard recently and when he comes home he just collapses in front of the TV until he falls asleep. Even the kids are complaining!

It needn't be this way. Now there's High Rise Potent Strength Ginseng Capsules. Specifically formulated to counter the ravaging effect of today's demanding lifestyle.

So, if you are pushing yourself to the limit, get High Rise today and start putting your life into perspective again!

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Website: www.gmpharm.co.za

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RIDE

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